

Corpus Christi [Father's Day] - (Year A) – June 18, 2017

DT 8:2-3, 14B-16A; PS 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20; 1 COR 10:16-17; JN 6:51-58

One of the reasons there's so much resistance *to*, and rejection *of* the clear **teaching of Jesus on the Eucharist** among **non-Catholic Christians** is that many Christians seem utterly unaware of the intimate connection between the **Old Testament** and **New Testament**. To make sense of so much of what Jesus says and does in the Gospels—especially his more obscure words and actions—a Christian really needs to understand how the New Testament both **flows from** the Old...and **fulfills** it.

The **Bread of Life Discourse**—the “homily” on the Eucharist that Jesus delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum—where he called himself the “**bread of life**” (cf. Jn 6:35, 48) and instructed his followers to **eat his flesh and drink his blood** (cf. Jn 6:52-58)—was so controversial that many—perhaps most—of his followers abandoned him over this teaching. And these particular words of Jesus continue to be rejected by many Christians today—or at least explained away by attributing a merely symbolic meaning to the words in a way that **Jesus himself** never did.

I ran into this personally with a fallen-away Catholic several years ago who had left the Church and become a self-professed “**Bible Christian**”. We were discussing the **Bread of Life Discourse** which is found in **Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John** and when I “suggested” to this man that he return home to the one **true** Church that can give him the bread of life, he responded:

“Jesus said ‘**My words are spirit and life**’” (cf. Jn 6:63) in that part of the Gospel.

I replied, “You know, you’re right. And what *were* those words? ‘**Eat my flesh and drink my blood or you do not have life in you**’.”

He scoffed and turned away, much like the large group of disciples in **John 6:66** in which we are told:

After this [this teaching of Jesus on the Eucharist] **many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.** (Jn 6:66)

Did you catch that? John 6, verse 66? **John 666!** The devil has succeeded from the time of Jesus’ first “unsuccessful” homily on the Eucharist, right up until **today**, to induce many of Jesus’ own followers to reject **Jesus’ own teaching** on this most

central and most important source of eternal life—his true **Body and Blood** in the **Holy Eucharist**.

So, let's look at two particular Old Testament references “veiled” in the teaching of Jesus regarding the Eucharist—the first being the **Passover** and the second being the **manna**, the bread from Heaven.

First, regarding the Passover, we refer to the **Book of Exodus**. In the first 13 verses of **Chapter 12 of the Book of Exodus**—*which I encourage all of you to read today when you get home*—God gives Moses and Aaron instructions for the people's final meal in Egypt—the Passover meal—before he liberates them from slavery and leads them through the desert to the Promised Land. Without going into too much detail here, we'll focus on **verses 8 and 10** which read:

They shall eat the flesh [of the lamb] that night...[a]nd you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. (Ex 12:8, 10)

In short, the flesh of the Passover lamb had to be *eaten*. So, file that fact away—that *the lamb had to be eaten*—and we'll see it come back into play in Jesus' words in the synagogue homily.

The second Old Testament reference refers to the **manna** that God provided his people in the desert to keep them alive while they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. The **instructions** that God gave his people through Moses regarding the **collection** and **eating** of the manna are found in **Exodus Chapter 16**—*which I encourage all of you to read today when you get home*. But let's focus on one verse that, as we'll see, has an interesting parallel to the Passover lamb.

And Moses said to them, “Let no man leave any of it till the morning.” (Ex 16:19)

In both cases, then—with the flesh of the **Passover lamb** and with the **manna**—the food must be **eaten...right away!**

Now, listen anew to the words of Jesus in the **Bread of Life Discourse** from **today's Gospel**:

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. (Jn 6:53-59)

And here’s the kicker...which Jesus spoke many centuries later! Remember in the Gospels of **Matthew** and **Luke** where Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and he gave them what we now call the “**Lord’s Prayer**” or the “**Our Father**”. When we pray this prayer together in a few minutes, pay special attention to these words, *in light of both the Passover Lamb and the manna*, both of which had to be eaten the same day:

*“Give us this day our **daily bread**”* (cf. Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3).

We ask...and God provides...at **every Mass**. *Every day*...in the Catholic Church.

Not just **Sunday**...*every* day...(except Good Friday, of course, when no Mass is celebrated).

And here’s the amazing thing. In our **1st Reading from Exodus**, Moses said to the Israelites:

Remember how for these forty years the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the wilderness, so as to test you by affliction, to know what was in your heart: to keep his commandments, or not. He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna a food unknown to you and your ancestors, so you might know that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut 8:2-3)

Not by bread alone, but all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord!

The words of God...*and* Bread! Not **one** or the **other**...but *both*!

Where do we find that? The Liturgy of the **Word**. The Liturgy of the **Eucharist**.

During the Mass. Daily!

In the Church that Jesus founded. The Catholic Church!

The Catholic Church is the guardian of the **Sacraments**—all seven of which **combine words with actual “stuff”** to fill us with God’s grace. In the Eucharist—the bread and wine is the “stuff” which, after the words of Jesus are pronounced over them, **become** what they signify—the true flesh and blood of Jesus—“*true food and true drink*” (cf. Jn 6:55). Then, in Holy Communion—we are given the most intimate possible union with Jesus this side of Heaven.

This is what St. Paul had in mind when he said, in our 2nd Reading:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)

Participation in the body and blood of Christ.

Sounds like more than just mere **words**, doesn’t it?

Now, since we’re celebrating **Father’s Day** today, let’s consider the connection between the **Eucharist** and **God the Father’s love and concern** for each one of us.

When God liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and led them through the desert to the Promised Land, he fed them with **manna**. But they still died, as Jesus said in today’s Gospel. God the Father sent food **down** from heaven—the manna—but it was a food that only sustained the body and only for a time.

But when God the Father sent **Jesus** from Heaven to earth, he sent this *new* “**manna**”—the true food and drink of the Eucharist—not only to feed our bodies, but especially to nourish our *souls*. It’s not a mere act of sending bread **down**. Because, as Jesus said in his synagogue homily at Capernaum:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. (Jn 6:54)

So it's a **downward** movement—the *sending* of the new manna—and an **upward** movement—the *raising* of our souls to heaven.

Now we can see how the Eucharist is God the Father's answers the prayer of the **Psalmist** in the Old Testament. In **Psalm 144**, the psalmist cries out to God:

Reach down from heaven and save me; draw me out from the mighty waters, from the hands of alien foes whose mouths are filled with lies, whose hands are raised in perjury. (Ps 144:7-8)

And in **Psalm 18**, we see God the Father's response:

From on high he reached down and seized me; he drew me forth from the mighty waters. He snatched me from my powerful foe, from my enemies whose strength I could not match. (Ps 18:17-18)

What does a **good father** do?

He *provides, protects, defends* and *saves*. He teaches his children by *allowing them to be tested by the trials of this world*, but he stands by ready to protect, defend and rescue his children when they are in **need**...or in **danger**.

Jesus is the "**life preserver**"—the "*eternal life*" *preserver*—sent by God the Father, by which he feeds us his **Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist**...and then lifts us up from the "mighty waters"—the raging storms of this life which threaten our souls.

It goes without saying that there is more—*much more*—to the Eucharist than meets the eye.

But the more deeply we understand the entirety of the **Word of God**—both the Old Testament and the New Testament—the more deeply we will appreciate the **Word Made Flesh** in the Holy Eucharist.

And then, we can say to Jesus what Peter said to him at the end of his synagogue homily:

"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (Jn 6:68)