



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 18th 2024**

Theme: “⁵⁵ For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 6: 51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; ⁵⁴ he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.”

Gospel Focus

Here the hard part is made clear: Jesus’ listener starts to quarrel at the tension introduced by all this talk of eating his body and drinking his blood. This is not normal, not what they expected from this preacher. However, Jesus’ insistence makes one thing clear: this God-made-flesh loves us fervently. He wants to be so close to us that he offers himself up with radical humility to be eaten. In eating the body of Christ, we transcend the barriers of our bodies and we are able to take him up into ourselves. We become more like Jesus as we are unified to him and we carry him to the world in an astonishingly real and concentrated way. We become “living tabernacles,” holy places for Jesus to repose-and for Jesus to go to work. We, in receiving the body of Christ, become the body of Christ, called to continue his mission on earth.

Gospel Reflection

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" One's sympathies easily go with the people who ask this question in today's gospel, struggling to understand what Jesus meant by offering as "bread" his "flesh for the life of the world." Elsewhere in Scripture, eating flesh carries a very negative connotation. "Devouring flesh" is the action of evildoers from which the psalmist prays to be delivered (Ps 27:2). Drinking blood is forbidden because the life is in the blood, over which only God has power (Gen 9:4; Deut 12:23; Acts 15:20).

Coupled with the first reading, we can see in John's Gospel clear parallels between Jesus and Woman Wisdom. She prepares her meat and wine, and sets her table and calls out to all to come and partake. She offers instruction to the simple and understanding that leads to life. Likewise, in the prologue (John 1: 1-18) there are other unmistakable parallels between the Logos and Wisdom, who existed with God from the beginning (Prov 8:27; Wis (:9//John 1:1), "pitched her tent" among humankind (see Sir 24:4, 8 // John 1:14), lights the path for them (Bar 4:2 // John 1:4-5), and yet suffers rejection (Prov 1:25, 29-31 // John 1:11).

It is in this likeness to a woman that we may find one way to understand Jesus' words in John 6: 51-58. Just as a mother gives her very flesh and blood to nurture a new life carried within her and then continues to feed the child from her own body after it is born, so Jesus nourishes with his very self all who are birthed to new life through him (John 3:3). Evoking at least subtly the union of mother and child while the latter dwells in the womb, Jesus promises, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (John 6:51). The mystery of how this life will last forever is also expressed by the Fourth Evangelist in a birthing metaphor when at the Last Supper Jesus likens his coming passion to the pangs of a woman in labor (John 16:21). The death of his earthly body is the birth to new life for all.

Some of the medieval mystics also found the image of motherhood a help for understanding the mystery of Jesus giving us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Julian of Norwich spoke of "God-all wisdom" as "our natural mother" and elaborated on how "a mother can give her child milk to suck, but our precious mother, Jesus, can feed us with himself. He does so most courteously and most tenderly, with the Blessed Sacrament, which is the precious food of true life.

Our response to the One who gives his flesh and blood for our life and that of the world is not only intellectual assent. Jesus gives his "flesh and blood," an expression that connotes the whole person. Therefore, we entrust our whole selves to him, body, mind and spirit, expressed in our physical partaking of the Eucharistic body and blood.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Proverbs 9:1-6

¹ Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars. ² She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. ³ She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the town, ⁴"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who is without sense she says, ⁵"Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight"

Responsorial Psalm—Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

R: Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the Lord; the lowly will hear me and be glad. **(R)**

Glorify the Lord with me, let us together extol his name. I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. **(R)**

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame. When the poor one called out, the Lord heard, and from all his distress he saved him. **(R)**

Second Reading — Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, ²⁰ always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

787. From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings.²¹⁵ Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: "Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches."²¹⁶ And he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."²¹⁷

994. But there is more. Jesus links faith in the resurrection to his own person: "I am the Resurrection and the life."⁵⁴⁴ It is Jesus himself who on the last day will raise up those who have believed in him, who have eaten his body and drunk his blood.⁵⁴⁵ Already now in this present life he gives a sign and pledge of this by restoring some of the dead to life,⁵⁴⁶ announcing thereby his own Resurrection, though it was to be of another order. He speaks of this unique event as the "sign of Jonah,"⁵⁴⁷ the sign of the temple: he announces that he will be put to death but rise thereafter on the third day.⁵⁴⁸

1001. When? Definitely "at the last day," "at the end of the world."⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, the resurrection of the dead is closely associated with Christ's Parousia:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.⁵⁵⁸

1391. *Holy Communion augments our union with Christ.* The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."²²⁶ Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me."²²⁷

On the feasts of the Lord, when the faithful receive the Body of the Son, they proclaim to one another the Good News that the first fruits of life have been given, as when the angel said to Mary Magdalene, "Christ is risen!" Now too are life and resurrection conferred on whoever receives Christ.²²⁸

1524. In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of "passing over" to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."¹⁴¹ The sacrament of Christ once dead and now risen, the Eucharist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father.¹⁴²

Sharing and Discussion

1. Bodily food is necessary for life on earth, Holy Communion is necessary for maintaining the life of the soul, which is more important for you? How do your current way of life testify to your views?
2. When we receive the Eucharist we carry Jesus within us and are called to continue his mission on earth? Do you agree that this is your mission? If so, in what ways can you make his presence more visible in the world?
3. Have you ever participated in some sharing of food or drink that you found to be a positive and meaningful experience of "Communion"? What made it such an experience?

Closing Prayer

All: Creator God, you breathed new life into the world through the sending of your Son and Spirit. Receive our prayers that we might be drawn out into the world to share your love with everyone we meet. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom will be resuming on 21st August 2024 – All are welcome!

Every Wednesday

Time: 8 – 9.30 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwYTZ3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

Meeting ID: 276 007 3734

Passcode: 1WordOfGod

All are welcome!

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References:

(1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible

(2) Gospel Reflection and Living Liturgy are taken from "Living Liturgy for Sundays and Solemnities" by Order of St Benedict. Published by Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota
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(3) CCC references are taken from Catechism of The Catholic Church