

Commentary to the Twentieth Sunday, Ordinary Time



This week we come to the climax of John 6. But this is not the last Sunday that we have a reading from this chapter. Next week we'll consider the disciples suggestion that Jesus "tone down" his teaching. That's the conclusion. Today we have the climax. John 6 is about sustenance. It is about eating. It is about nourishment. It is about the Eucharist. It is not about eating like we normally eat. Normally, when we eat, we assimilate the food. Forgive my simplification, but basically, our body breaks down the food, takes the nutrients it needs, and feeds our cell system. In a sense, the food becomes part of us, although not as much of us as the guy who eats so much chicken that he starts growing feathers. I guess I should qualify that, because I have met a large number of people who share my Italian heritage who look like they have been turned into meatballs. Still, eating is about what we do with the food. We assimilate the food. But that is not what happens when we receive the Eucharist.

When we receive the Eucharist, instead of us assimilating the food, the food assimilates us. When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus transforms us. We take on the life of the Lord. We just heard: "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." During the last three or four years, more and more people in our parish have recognized the importance of adoring the Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. We added four hours to the time set aside for First Friday adoration. We initiated beginning Lent with Forty Hours. Our young people have a real hunger to receive communion and to adore the Lord in the Eucharist. Every time you ask any of the Teens who return from a spiritual experience like a Steubenville Conference or a week at Covecrest, "What was your favorite part?" the vast majority of the Teens respond, "Eucharistic Adoration."

The attraction of the Eucharist is dynamic. Jesus is dynamic. When we receive communion or when we come to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, we don't receive an inanimate object. We don't kneel before a static entity. This is not a crucifix or a statue that reminds us of something. This is Jesus. The

One Who Is. When we receive communion or come to adoration, we take within ourselves or we come before the dynamic, powerful Presence who speaks to us through the life He has given us. How great is our God. He has found a way for each of us to have continual, intimate encounters with Him. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes that the Eucharist is the Dynamic Presence that grasps us and makes us His Own. The fundamental action of Jesus's life, the reason why He became one of us, was the gift of Himself in His passion, death and resurrection: the Paschal Event. The gift of His sacrificial love re-established our union with God and our capacity to share in his immortality. Or to put it simply: because He died for us we can live forever with him. When Jesus gave us his Body and Blood the night before He died and when he gives us His Body and Blood every time we receive communion, the Lord gives us the total sacrifice of Himself to his Father.

"This is my Body which shall be given up for you. This is the cup of my Blood, the new and everlasting covenant that shall be shed for you and for all until the end of time." When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus is present as the Servant of God who in His sacrificial death is saving us all. Right here, right now. Today's Gospel states: "The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal." In the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist we receive Jesus saving His people, saving us now. We receive Christ strengthening us and transforming our joys and sorrows into prayers to His Father. Our union with Christ in the Eucharist is union with Christ in passion, death and resurrection. Sometimes we are full of the joy of the Resurrection, sometimes the sorrow of the Passion, but always we are strengthened by the one who gives us His Body and Blood. The Lord is always in action. His Presence is dynamic. The first reading speaks about the Wisdom of God. God has built a house and invited us to a dinner. "Come and eat and drink and live forever," He says. He gives us the dream of living in peace and happiness totally united to Him for all eternity.

The marvelous paradox of our Eucharistic relationship with the Lord is that the more we have Him, the hungrier we are for Him. Only God in His Infinite Wisdom could find a way to satisfy our hungry hearts while leaving us even hungrier for Him. We can't get enough of Him. We never will until we are fully united to Him in heaven. Today we pray for the Gift of the Holy Spirit called Reverence. May we revere the Dynamic Presence that assimilates Us into Himself every time we receive His Body and Blood.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ