

June 11, 2023

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowds: I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

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."

Background:

In the opening verse, Jesus identifies himself as the bread from heaven. In the next verse, he states that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood has life eternal. The fact that the Jews quarreled among themselves at this statement should not be a surprise. The word that Jesus used, that is translated as "eats" here, would carry a sense of gnawing, as a dog with a bone. Drinking blood was prohibited within the Jewish community. No wonder some of the Jews who were hearing this questioned his teaching. But in the gospel John often presents the questions that arise as an opportunity for further instruction.

Jesus explains, "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." (John 6:51) In case they missed the point, Jesus restates this point three more times (verses 53, 54, and 55). The expression "flesh and blood" was a way to describe a human person. For those Jesus is addressing, the term "flesh and blood" would also call to mind the animals that were ritually slaughtered as offerings to God--including offerings made throughout the year, but especially those made as part of the Passover observance. Jesus is describing himself as the lamb that was killed and had its blood drained so that it could be used as a sacrificial offering. This same connection will be made later in John's gospel when John places the hour of Jesus' death at about the time when the lambs were being killed for the Passover observance.

For John's community, Jesus is their food and drink. Because John's gospel is the last written, those in the community have had more time to reflect on the significance of the Jewish tradition in light of Jesus' life and teaching. The experience of God feeding the Jews in the desert is a familiar part of their religious tradition to help them understand God's new revelation in Jesus. It is not enough to believe in Jesus, or even to ritually participate in the new customs of the Christian community. They are seeking to understand how God is continuing to nourish them on this, their new journey, without the familiar temple worship that was at the core of their relationship with God.

Reflection Questions:

1. If someone said of another that they had put their flesh and blood into a project, how would you understand that statement? How might a person of a different culture background misunderstand what was being said?
2. What images come to mind when you think of flesh? What images come to mind when you think of blood?
3. Have you ever had periods when you did not get enough to eat? How far back would you have to go in your family tree to a generation that truly worried about not having enough to eat? How do you think the experience of hunger affected them?
4. Have there been times in your life when you felt a hunger or a thirst that was not about food or drink?
5. How many times can you recall the scriptures referring to God who is feeding God's people?

6. Why would John take the time to note that the Jews quarreled among themselves over Jesus's teaching?
7. Are there aspects of God's relationship with us that you have quarreled about?
8. What are the things that nourish your soul, your spirit, and your relationship with God?
9. What does this say to you about God's desire for you?
10. Can you take some time now or later today to speak to God about what this text is saying to you at this time of your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-alledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the Readings for June 11, 2023, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

Moses said to the people: "Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you and find out whether it was your intention to keep his commandments. He let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, to show you that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord. "Do not forget the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; who guided you through the desert with its serpents and scorpions, its parched ground; who brought forth water for you from the rock and fed you with manna."

Praise the Lord, Jerusalem. Glorify the Lord; praise your God, O Zion.
For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; he has blessed your children within you.
He has granted peace in your borders; with the best of wheat he fills you.
He sends forth his command to the earth; swiftly runs his word!
He has proclaimed his word to Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances to Israel.
He has not done thus for any other nation; his ordinances he has not made known to them. Alleluia.

Brothers and sisters:

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?
Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Jesus said to the Jewish crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

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."

Excerpts from Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16; Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; and John 6:51-58

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for June 11th, the feast of Corpus Christi, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel for this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is from the bread of life discourse in the gospel of John. In it, Jesus explains to the people, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The other readings also have references to people being fed, through the benevolence of God, and his word, and the water and manna in the desert, and the body and blood of Christ. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people, "Do not forget the Lord who brought forth water for you from the rock and fed you in the desert with manna, in order to show you that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord. Psalm 147 exclaims, "Praise the Lord; with the best of wheat he fills you. He sends forth his command to the earth; swiftly runs his word!" In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "The cup is a participation in the blood of Christ; the bread is a participation in the body of Christ. We are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

At the beginning of John's chapter six, 5000 men are fed all they want when Jesus distributes five barley loaves and two fish, and twelve baskets of leftover fragments are collected afterward. That evening, as the disciples row four miles across the Sea of Galilee and are nearly to Capernaum, Jesus approaches, walking on the water. The next day those remaining who had been fed also cross in boats, looking for Jesus, and when they find him he tells them, "You are looking for me because you ate and were filled." The next 35 verses of chapter six are called the bread of life discourse, where Jesus teaches them, "Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life." When they say to him, "Our ancestors ate manna in the desert," he replies, "It was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." Today's gospel is from the end of this teaching.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!