

August 8, 2021
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 6:41-51

The Jews murmured about Jesus because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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."

Background:

The gospel text from last Sunday concluded with Jesus making the assertion that "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." (John 6:35) In the verses between last week's text and the gospel for this week, Jesus also makes a number of other bold statements, the last of which is "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day." (John 6:40)

The text for this week opens with the Jews murmuring against Jesus because he has made the claim that "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They seem to have taken issue with the part of Jesus' statement that he has "come from heaven." Some of them knew his father and mother. To them, Jesus is claiming that he is more important, having more status, than is rightfully his by his birth. In the United States, to come from humble beginnings and to rise to greatness is consistent with our image of ourselves as a culture. Anyone can rise from humble beginnings to be a great success in government, business, entertainment, sports, etc. The opposite is true for the culture in which Jesus lived. One's family determined one's personal worth and honor. To strive to rise above one's birth status was looked down upon, and it even threatened the social fabric on which a fragile system of survival was based.

In the gospel text for today, John connects the incident with the Exodus experience of the Jewish people by using the word "murmur." It is the same word used in Exodus to describe the Jews complaining to God. That led to their being fed with manna. Jesus' response to their complaint takes up their challenge in a way that will either enhance his honor or that of his challengers. He too uses the word "murmur," he reinforces the connection to Exodus, and he draws on that Exodus experience to further unfold his teaching.

Jesus' claims draw on the prophets, who stated that it is God who must initiate their coming to him. Therefore, if they have difficulties with Jesus, then it must be that they have a difficulty with God. They are not accepting "the one whom God has sent." Only those whom God draws will be drawn to Jesus. Jesus has come down from heaven, and he will draw those to whom God has sent him back to God on the last day. As the text continues, Jesus claims further that he is the only one who has seen the Father, and finally that he is the bread of life. Unlike the Jews in the Exodus who ate the bread that came from the sky and merely avoided starvation, the ones who eat this bread will live forever.

Those who hear this text today might assume that Jesus' statements about being the "bread of life" are references to Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. Those that would have heard this interchange between the Jews and Jesus would not have heard these statements in that light. (The Institution of the Eucharist had not yet taken place.) They would have been familiar with other places in their tradition where the Wisdom of God is

presented as food or bread. (Proverbs 9:5, Sirach 15: 3) Those present could have understood Jesus' statement that the living bread God gives is "my flesh for the life of the world" as the human body of the person of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you encounter people who have questions about God's presence in the Eucharist, how do you respond to them? Are you responding to them from your head, your heart, or some combination of both?
2. Have you had questions about faith? What kind of responses have been helpful? What kind of responses have not been helpful?
3. Do you know people who have made claims of their experience of God that are difficult for you to believe?
4. Have you had experiences of God in your life that are difficult for others to believe?
5. What do you hear Jesus telling you when he says "I am the living bread come down from heaven?" How do you respond?
6. For what is it that you hunger?
7. How is God nourishing you?
8. Can you take some time to talk with God about your desire to be nourished by God, or about how great is your faith in God's desire to nourish you?

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://fscs-calledtobe.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 August 8, 2021, the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Elijah went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death saying: "This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!" He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.

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. 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. Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame.

*When the afflicted man called out, the Lord heard, and from all his distress he saved him.
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.
Taste and see how good the Lord is; blessed the man who takes refuge in him.*

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.

The Jews murmured about Jesus because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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."

Excerpts from 1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:2-9; Ephesians 4:30—5:2; and John 6:41-51

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for August 8th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel continues from John chapter six, which we have heard from for the past two weeks. Jesus explains in some depth that he is the Bread of Life. Jesus told them, "Everyone who learns from my Father comes to me. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats it will live forever. The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." The other readings also make reference to receiving exceptional nourishment and forgiveness from the Lord. In the first reading from 1 Kings, after a day's journey in the desert, Elijah prayed for death and then fell asleep. He was touched by an angel who told him to get up and eat. He ate a hearthcake he found by his head and it nourished him for the forty-day journey to Mount Horeb. Psalm 34 declares, "The angel of the Lord delivers those who fear Him. Taste and see how good the Lord is. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." In the second reading from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "God has forgiven you in Christ. Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God."

Joe

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

*You have snatched me from death, and kept my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God in the light of the living.*

Psalm 56:14