

The word “bread” appears around 450 times in the Bible. So, what do you think of when you hear the word bread? When I think of bread outside of a Scriptural context, I remember my wife’s Grandmother. She made the best bread. It was very much a part of who she was. When she said she was coming to visit, you made certain that you had flour, and yeast, and everything needed to make bread, because when she arrived, she would often walk in the door, hand you her suitcases, and head for the kitchen. Where she would then produce an apron from somewhere and begin to bake bread. She was rather reserved person, and I’ve often thought that her bread was her way of showing her love.

Well, a few weeks ago, we stepped away from the Gospel of St. Mark and began a six-week journey with the Gospel of St. John. We’re well into the Bread of Life Discourse. Now, the old teacher in me is going to suggest a bit of homework. (My apologies to the children and youth who have just started back to school.) I would like to suggest that when you have a chance this week, you read the entire sixth chapter of John all in one sitting. It won’t take long. It will be worth your time.

But, for today, let's consider where we've been and where we're going. We began this journey with the multiplication of the loaves. We skipped over the story of Jesus walking on the water, and for the last two Sundays, we have read from the Bread of Life Discourse.

Well, today we have reached at a turning point. In today's Gospel, the people aren't happy with where Jesus' teachings are going. They came looking to be fed, and they were, but Jesus was offering them spiritual not physical nourishment. And they didn't like where Jesus was going with it. We heard, "The Jews murmured about him 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 replies, "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." We are drawn to Jesus by the Father and offered the gift of salvation.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him..." In the original form of the Gospel, the Greek word that we translate as draw is almost always used to convey some sort of resistance. And that is where these folks are.

The people, who welcomed being fed miraculously with the multiplication of the loaves and followed, looking for more, are now faced with the challenge of belief, of faith, and they resist. They are saying, ‘Hey, this is Joe and Mary’s boy. He didn’t come from heaven; he came from Nazareth.’”

Today’s Gospel reading closes with Jesus saying, “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.” This prepares us for what is to come, as many in the crowd will turn away, and, in a few weeks, we will end with Peter professing his faith as he declares “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

“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.” In John’s recounting of the Last Supper, we don’t find a narrative of Jesus instituting the Eucharist; instead we find the washing of the Apostles’ feet, a call to service. Many scholars consider these words from today’s Gospel as the way in which the writer of John’s Gospel gives us the institution of the Eucharist.

OK, so what does this mean to us? - and - Why have the readings taken us here? Well, in Mark's Gospel the Apostles and the reader gradually grow to understand who Jesus really is. In John's Gospel there is no doubt. From the prologue to the end, Jesus is clearly the Christ, the Savior, God Incarnate, and the gift of salvation comes to us through Him, the Bread of Life, the Eucharist.

We gather each Sunday to receive the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Jesus, and in doing so, we are challenged to believe, to have faith. Consider that each time we approach the minister of Communion we engage in a dialogue. The minister makes a statement of belief, "The Body of Christ", or "The Blood of Christ," and with our "Amen" we declare, "I believe, I agree, this is so." But, do we always think about what we are doing -what we are saying? The beauty of ritual is that we know what to expect. The danger of ritual is that we can come to take the miraculous for granted.

This is where the proclamation of the sixth chapter of John is leading us, hopefully, to a deeper belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is central to who we are as Church, as Catholics. And our belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is what defines us. It's the manifestation of God's love for us.

So, as we continue today, let us focus on Jesus' words, "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." And, let our "Amen" truly mean "I believe, I agree, this is so."