

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug. 18-19, 2018, Cycle B

With this Sunday we continue our reflections on chapter 6 of the Gospel of John, Jesus' Bread of Life discourse. Next weekend we will conclude our reading of chapter 6 of John, and on the weekend of September 1st-2nd, we will return to where we left off in the Gospel of Mark.

Again, this weekend we hear Jesus declare to us: "I am the living bread come down from heaven..." And Jesus even gets quite graphic with us, telling us: "...the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. And even more challenging yet, Jesus adds: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life..." Eating flesh, drinking blood, all seems rather repulsive, and can make us want to turn away. In the end some of Jesus' own disciples do turn away from him. But Jesus warns us: "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

As the Gospel tells us: many quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" What does all this mean: eating his flesh and drinking his blood? What is he saying - He is the living bread? Perhaps we can glean a clue from what Jesus says further on:

"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."

"Feeds on me!" Feeding means more than just chewing with our teeth. It is true that Jesus is saying that He is the very food of eternal life; but how do we feed on Jesus thereby making Him our food who gives us eternal life? Jesus himself gave us the best explanation in His Last Supper Discourse with His disciples! Instead of using the metaphors of food and drink, he used the metaphors of the vine and the branches. Jesus said: "I am the vine you are the branches! Branches only receive nourishment and remain alive through the vine, which brings nourishment to the branches.

When Jesus presents himself as bread and drink, as flesh and blood for eating and drinking, He is inviting us to receive him into ourselves in such a way that his very life becomes our own. Like a branch that receives the Life of the vine. Among those who were arguing about what Jesus was saying, those who were listening carefully understood Jesus to be presenting himself as God's gift in their day just as surely as the manna had been God's gift for their ancestors when Moses led them through the desert for 40 years to the promised land! That manna kept them alive, but as Jesus says alive only for a perishable life: "Your ancestors ate and still died." God is offering something new and different in Jesus!

Jesus is God's gift of nourishment and sustenance for us today and Jesus, because the life He gives is the Father's Life, while His Life gives us a Life that lasts forever. "... who ever eats this bread will live forever." The challenge is to make Jesus the true bread of our life, and in the end we do that by constantly feeding on His words in the scriptures and sacramentally at the banquet table He spreads for us.