

20TH SUNDAY (B) JOHN 6: 51 - 58

“TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD” - IS THE PSALM REFRAIN THIS WEEK AND LAST WEEK AS WE CONTINUE OUR 5 WEEKS OF GOSPELS REFLECTING ON THE EUCHARIST.

TODAY’S READING COMES FROM THE HEART OF JOHN’S GOSPEL CHAPTER 6, TITLED, “THE BREAD OF LIFE.” TWO OF THE IMPORTANT WAYS THAT JOHN WRITES HIS GOSPEL ARE FOUND IN THIS PASSAGE. FIRST, JOHN BREAKS UP JESUS’ TEACHING WITH QUESTIONS FROM HIS LISTENERS. SECOND, JESUS ANSWERS QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS OWN ORIGINS IN CHALLENGING WAYS THAT MAKE HIS LISTENERS THINK.

HE CLAIMS TO BE THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN, THE TRUE BREAD FROM GOD COMMANDING ABSOLUTE FAITH FROM HIS FOLLOWERS. AND THIS BRINGS US TO A STRANGE PARADOX. NO ONE CAN BELIEVE IN JESUS UNLESS THE FATHER DRAWS THEM; FOR ANYONE TO COME TO JESUS WITH FAITH MEANS THAT THEY HAVE BEEN TAUGHT BY GOD.

TODAY THE EVANGELIST MAKES THE LINK BETWEEN THIS GIFT OF FAITH AND THE EUCHARIST. SO, WE ARE CONTINUING THE THEME OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS THAT STARTED WITH THE MIRACLE OF THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES BUT NOW OUR FOCUS IS ON HOW THIS EUCHARISTIC MEAL THAT WE ARE ABOUT TO SHARE POINTS TO THE RESURRECTION. LAST WEEK WE HEARD JESUS SAYING: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE; WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL EVER BE HUNGRY. THIS WEEK OUR READING OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CONTINUES AND WE COME TO A NEW ASPECT OF CHRIST’S TEACHING... I AM THE LIVING BREAD COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, WHOEVER EATS OF THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER.

SO, THIS BREAD AND WINE THAT WE SHARE CONSECRATED BY FATHER ADAM INTO THIS EUCHARISTIC MEAL THAT SEEMS SO ORDINARY IS IN FACT ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL MEANS BY WHICH WE WILL ENTER INTO ETERNAL LIFE. THIS SOUNDS REALLY GOOD TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE HERE; IN FACT, IT’S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU WONDER WHY EVERYONE ISN’T

JOINING US WEEK AFTER WEEK? IF WE RECEIVE THE LORD FREQUENTLY THROUGH OUR CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT WE WILL ULTIMATELY REACH OUR GOAL, THE GOAL WE ALL LONG FOR, ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN. FOR MANY CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS THIS IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE FAITH.

BUT THE STATEMENT DOES NOT END WITH JESUS SAYING WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD THEY WILL LIVE FOREVER. HE SAYS THE BREAD THAT I WILL GIVE IS MY FLESH FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD. SUDDENLY WE ARE REMINDED OF THE CROSS. THIS IS NOT A SIMPLE MEAL; IT IS A HOLY SACRIFICE... THIS IS MY BODY - THIS IS MY BLOOD... TODAY WE GET A GLIMPSE OF THE DEPTH OF MEANING FOUND IN THE EUCHARIST ITSELF. THE SIMPLE VIEW OF THE FAITH IS NO LONGER ENOUGH. THE TRUTH IS THAT AS IMPORTANT AS THE EUCHARIST IS THERE IS NOTHING THAT YOU AND I CAN DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE. JESUS ALREADY DID IT ALL BY HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

JUST PAUSE AND IMAGINE THE SCENE AS JESUS WAS PREACHING TO HIS FOLLOWERS SO MANY YEARS AGO. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN HIS AUDIENCE ARE MURMURING IN PROTEST AT HIS BLASPHEMOUS CLAIMS TO BE THE BREAD THAT COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN... THIS PREACHER, THIS SON OF JOSEPH AND MARY.

WE KNOW THE TRUTH THAT THIS BRIEF EXCHANGE BETWEEN JESUS AND THE PHARISEES ABOUT THE EUCHARIST WAS REALLY HIS WAY OF TEACHING US ABOUT HIS OWN LIFE AND THE DEATH HE WAS TO SUFFER. THIS PARTICULAR LESSON WAS TAUGHT THE MORNING AFTER ONE OF THE BUSIEST DAYS IN OUR LORD'S LIFE. HE AND THE DISCIPLES CROSSED THE LAKE TO TRY TO FIND A LITTLE PEACE AND TIME TO PRAY. BUT THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED HIM TO ASK HIM QUESTIONS. AND HIS RESPONSE... WELL HE DIDN'T SAY I EXPLAINED IT YESTERDAY OR I'LL TELL YOU MORE TOMORROW AFTER I REST A WHILE. NO, HE PATIENTLY TRIES TO EXPLAIN EVEN THOUGH IT IS OBVIOUS TO US TODAY THAT HE IS

TALKING ABOUT HIS OWN SUFFERING AND DEATH HIS LISTENERS WEREN'T ABLE TO UNDERSTAND.

SO, WHAT IS THIS MASS ABOUT FOR US FOLLOWERS, US 21ST CENTURY DISCIPLES? WELL IT IS PRACTICALLY THE SAME AS IT WAS FOR JESUS. AN AWESOME REMINDER AND A SYMBOL OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES AND THE FOOD WHICH WE RECEIVE, THE SMALL PIECE OF BREAD, THE SIP OF WINE ARE A DIRECT COMMUNION WITH OUR LOVING SAVIOR AND MORE NOURISHING THAN ANY SUNDAY BRUNCH OR BAR B Q'D STEAK THAT WE ARE LIKELY TO ENJOY LATER TODAY. FOR THROUGH THIS EUCHARISTIC MEAL WE FIND THE INSPIRATION AND THE STRENGTH AND THE FELLOWSHIP TO RENEW OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES EVERY WEEK TOGETHER.

WHAT WAS ONCE TAUGHT BY OUR CHURCH MAINLY AS AN OBLIGATION FOR CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS IS NOW SEEN FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS A EUCHARISTIC MEAL, A CELEBRATION OF OUR FAITH AND A FOCUS POINT FOR OUR LIVES.

TO CONCLUDE, IT MIGHT BE GOOD TO HEAR AND REFLECT ON THE WORDS OF A VERY GREAT MAN WHO TRULY LIVED LIKE JESUS.

“WE HAVE JUST HEARD IN THE GOSPEL THAT THOSE WHO SURRENDER TO THE SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE THROUGH THE LOVE OF CHRIST WILL LIVE LIKE THE GRAIN OF WHEAT THAT DIES TO YIELD FRUIT. THIS HOPE {ACTUALLY} COMFORTS US AS CHRISTIANS. WE KNOW THAT EVERY EFFORT WE MAKE TO IMPROVE SOCIETY, ABOVE ALL WHEN SOCIETY IS SO FULL OF INJUSTICE AND SIN, IS AN EFFORT THAT GOD BLESSES, {THAT GOD} WANTS AND {EVEN} DEMANDS {OF US}. WE HAVE THE SECURITY OF KNOWING THAT WHAT WE PLANT, IF NOURISHED WITH CHRISTIAN HOPE, WILL NEVER FAIL. THIS HOLY MASS, THIS EUCHARIST, IS CLEARLY AN ACT OF FAITH. THIS BODY BROKEN AND BLOOD SHED FOR HUMAN BEINGS ENCOURAGES US TO GIVE OUR BODY AND BLOOD UP TO SUFFERING AND PAIN, AS CHRIST DID

- NOT FOR SELF, BUT TO BRING JUSTICE AND PEACE {TO OTHERS}. LET US BE INTIMATELY UNITED IN FAITH AND HOPE AT THIS MOMENT {IN OUR LIVES.}

THESE WERE AMONG THE VERY LAST WORDS OF ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO BEFORE HE WAS MURDERED WHILE CELEBRATING MASS IN A SMALL CHAPEL IN A HOSPITAL IN EL SALVADOR MANY YEARS AGO.

WE COME TO CHURCH AND WE RECEIVE COMMUNION, NOT BECAUSE OF A CHURCH RULE BUT BECAUSE OUR JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT. WE RECEIVE COMMUNION BECAUSE WE NEED SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR THIS JOURNEY. THE LORD GIVES US THIS FOOD. HE IS OUR FOOD. HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.