

From The Pastor

“I am the living bread come down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Amen, amen I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.”

In the third of four weeks in the sixth chapter of John’s gospel on the Bread of Life, we come to the heart of the matter. The gospel writer John is well known for his symbolism and mystical expression of the divine gift given in Jesus. Elusive as it all might seem, John really has done a masterful job in helping us understand the real gift that Jesus is in the Eucharist.

It is clear that John is writing for those who are seeking the true way of God. Only those who look with eyes of faith and listen with their hearts will come to reap the fruit of what is being said. John introduces this by confronting the murmuring of those who are not ready to be open on a spiritual level. “Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him...” “Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.”

For the person attentive and aware of the inner self this language will make sense. The one who is open to God ‘listens’ and comes to faith, and is stirred in their inner center (soul) by the Father. For those unable or unwilling to live from this inner place hearing the Father and coming to true faith is a greater challenge. Jesus is inviting those who murmur to reconsider the words they hear from their hearts and souls, and not only what they hear and see in the world.

The prominent theme of John’s gospel is ‘eternal life’. What does John mean by eternal life? In our time, we tend to think of eternal life as heaven or life with God after death. We may think of eternal life as a segment of time, everlasting or unending life with God. This is not what John means when he uses the term.

Eternal life means to have faith in Jesus whom the Father has sent to the world. Eternal life is a dynamic, living relationship and not a static, finite one. Eternal life is God’s life, and that life is offered to us in and through Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God, and the One who God has sent to save the world through the Incarnation. In this sense, Jesus himself is eternal life. Jesus is the living, dynamic fullness of the presence of God. Jesus is eternal life; those who believe in him have eternal life through him. In this dynamic sense, eternal life refers more to the fullness of life we find in ourselves through our faith in Jesus. Believing in Jesus leads us to share in the wholeness of life (eternal life) that is to be ours in the Father. Sharing the fullness of the Father’s life can only be known through Jesus whom the Father has sent.

Jesus is the living bread come down from heaven. Why bread? Bread is nourishment and life. Every culture and society has some form of bread. Jesus is food for all people who seek to believe in him and find life in him. Life in Jesus is a life of faith grounded in the relationships of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Those with eyes of faith and listening hearts will know that Jesus is spiritual bread, bread for the soul that leads to fulfillment and happiness in God. How can this be more real for us? Ponder from the heart and the soul, and not the stomach or with the mind of the world. Jesus could not be more real when he says, ‘my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.’

What is Jesus saying? Jesus is God’s food and life for the world. Jesus is God’s body, God’s self for those who will believe in him. The Incarnation gave Jesus a human body in the flesh exactly like yours and mine. The human flesh, his physical body is given on the Cross as bread and food for the world. The body of God, in Christ Jesus, is offered as sacrifice for the freedom of our bodies unto eternal life; life in and with God.

In this context, flesh and blood mean person and life. More than the flesh of a physical body, Jesus offers the fullness of his person, his very self, the divine self that is God. In his blood, Jesus pours out his life, the divine life, so that our lives might find new life (eternal life) through him. Those who believe in Jesus as the one whom the Father sent, who eat his body and drink his blood will have eternal life. They will have the person and the life of God in themselves, through faith, in Jesus who is our food for eternal life.

This is what we mean by ‘Real Presence’. We believe that the divine person and life of Jesus is fully real and present to us in this sacrament through his body and blood. This calls for an active and mature faith. Our Eucharist is not a symbolism or a metaphor. We believe that the living person and life of Jesus is ours in this wonderful sacrament. Focus your faith here. Open our soul to the mystery of the divine living in you. This is your eternal life in God here and now. To become more and more like Jesus whom we receive, we will come to the fullness of the eternal life we already share.

I will be on vacation from August 15 through August 28. Enjoy the rest of the summer.

Father John Esper

