

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — August 8, 2021

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:30—5:2, 11-13; John 6:41-51

We have been hearing from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John for several weeks, and today's reading is the first part of what is called the "Bread of Life Discourse." The "Bread of Life Discourse" is the go-to scripture for our defense of the "True Presence" of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist. But we need to understand that there are two parts to this discourse of Jesus. The second part would normally be proclaimed next week, but next week the Church celebrates the ***Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary***. The second part of the discourse gets to the heart of the True Presence, where Jesus says "*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you*" (Jn 6:53).

But in the first part of the discourse, which we just heard, Jesus speaks of his *divine* nature, and that we must *believe* that he is God incarnate, who came down from heaven.

For nearly two-thousand years, Christians have recognized that Jesus, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is divine: that is, from God and of God. Earlier this week in one of the readings from the daily lectionary, from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And it was Simon Peter who declared that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (16:16). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that the Church "confesses that Jesus is inseparably true God and true man. He is truly the Son of God, who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother" (CCC 469). In other words, Jesus is fully human, *and* fully divine.

But it seems as though so many people are questioning and even denying this truth. You see it on TV shows, movies, in bookstores, and especially in higher education. This creates confusion and misunderstanding. Disbelief in the divinity of Jesus is a heresy—being opposed to Church doctrine. But if you want to know the truth, this is nothing new. The Church has been dealing with heresies that deny Jesus' divinity from its foundation.

In fact, most of the early Church councils dealt with just this subject—the divinity of Jesus. The Catechism goes on to say that "the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it" (CCC 464). Some of these heresies claimed that Jesus had a human body and soul, but a divine mind—that he was not fully God nor fully human; that Jesus was not God, but a created being (think of the Creed, where we state that Jesus was "begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father"; the word "consubstantial" means "of the same substance" or having the same nature); another heresy stated that Jesus' human nature ceased to exist when the divinity of the Second Person of the Trinity assumed it. In other words, he had only a human nature until sometime later in his life, such as at his Baptism, the transfiguration, or even his resurrection, when he became divine at that point in time.

What we see in today's Gospel reading from John is that even before the Church had to deal with these heresies, the people who were following Jesus and listening to him were shocked at the idea that Jesus was divine as well. They "murmured about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven,'" and asked "How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?" This should remind us of the Israelites in the desert during the Exodus, who murmured against Moses and God, and were willing to reject God in order to return to Egypt where their base needs were satisfied.

So before he begins to talk about eating his flesh or drinking his blood, Jesus is talking about the manna in order to reveal his heavenly origin—his divinity. And what he wants to do first of all is to lead the people to believe in him. They need to believe that he is God that came down from heaven: the true bread, the living bread that came down from heaven. And this is really important—because if they don't believe in his divinity, that he is God, there is no way they will believe that he can give us his flesh to eat, and that by doing so we can have eternal life.

Think about it—if we believe that God created the world, and not just the world, but the whole universe, the whole cosmos, out of *nothing*, and if we believe that Jesus is that same God who came to us as a man, is it really so hard to believe that he can change bread and wine into his own flesh and blood, and continue to do that throughout the ages even today on an altar in a church in Coshocton, Ohio? But ... if we don't believe that Jesus is God—maybe that he is a great teacher, prophet, and even miracle worker—but not divine, then believing in the True Presence of his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist becomes extremely difficult if not impossible. That is why Jesus reveals the mystery of his divinity to the people before he reveals the mystery of the Eucharist.

And this is why our Profession of Faith in the Creed that we pray every Sunday is so important. We begin with the words "*I believe in one God,*" and continue by saying "*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ ... God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.*" And when do we pray this in the Mass? Right before the Liturgy of the Eucharist—the consecration of the bread and wine so "that they may become the Body and Blood of ... our Lord Jesus Christ."

So I've got a little homework assignment for you. Don't worry, it's easy, and I won't give you a quiz on it. First—reread today's Gospel passage, slowly, and think about how Jesus is challenging us to believe that he is truly divine—that he is God, who came that we "might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Second—find a copy of the Nicene Creed that we pray at Mass every Sunday, and do the same thing: read it slowly, and meditate on what we say we believe. Ask yourself: "Do I really believe what I say I believe?" And think of the words "I believe" that we say four times in the Creed.

Third, and last—read what would normally be next week's Gospel Passage from John Chapter 6, the second part of the "Bread of Life Discourse." Think about how Jesus is leading his disciples by believing in his divinity to understand that he can really and truly give us his flesh to eat, and that by doing so, we may have eternal life. And that with this discourse, he is preparing both his apostles and his followers for what would happen one year later at Passover, when he would institute the Eucharist, and give his apostles the authority to "do this in memory of me."

And because of that, even two thousand years later, Jesus fulfills his promise through his bishops and priests who celebrate the Mass (even on an altar in a church in Coshocton, Ohio) to feed us with his Body and Blood, and that he is "with [us] always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).