

GOSPEL

JOHN 6:51-58

Jesus said to the Jews:

'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said.

Jesus replied:

'I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day.

For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.

This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In Italy and in many countries we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ — the Latin name is often used: *Corpus Domini* or *Corpus Christi*. Every Sunday the ecclesial community gathers around the Eucharist, the sacrament instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper. Nevertheless, each year we joyfully celebrate the feast dedicated to this Mystery that is central to the faith, in order to fully express our adoration to Christ who offers himself as the food and drink of salvation.

Today's Gospel passage, taken from Saint John, is part of the sermon on the "bread of life". Jesus states: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread...; and the bread which I shall

give for the life of the world is my flesh". He means to say that the Father has sent him into the world as the food of eternal life, and for this reason he will sacrifice himself, his flesh. Indeed, on the Cross, Jesus gave his body and shed his blood. The Son of Man crucified is the true Paschal Lamb, who delivers us from the slavery of sin and sustains us on the journey to the promised land. The Eucharist is the sacrament of his flesh given so as to give life to the world; those who are nourished by this food abide in Jesus and live through him. To assimilate Jesus means to abide in him, to become children in the Son.

In the Eucharist Jesus, as he did with the disciples at Emmaus, draws alongside us, pilgrims in history, to nourish the faith, hope and charity within us; to comfort us in trials; to sustain us in the commitment to justice and peace. This supportive presence of the Son of God is everywhere: in cities and the countryside, in the North and South of the world, in countries with a Christian tradition and in those newly evangelized. In the Eucharist he offers himself as spiritual strength so as to help us put into practice his commandment — to love one another as he loved us — building communities that are welcoming and open to the needs of all, especially the most frail, poor and needy people.

Nourishing ourselves of the Eucharistic Jesus also means abandoning ourselves trustingly to him and allowing ourselves to be guided by him. It means welcoming Jesus in place of one's own "me". In this way the love freely received from Jesus in the Eucharistic Communion, by the work of the Holy Spirit, nourishes our love for God and for the brothers and sisters we meet along the daily journey. Nourished by the Body of Christ, we become ever more concretely the mystical Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who

are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17).

May the Virgin Mary, who was ever united to Jesus Bread of Life, help us to rediscover the beauty of the Eucharist, to nourish ourselves of it with faith, so as to live in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus repeatedly claims that this bread and wine is his flesh and blood – how does this make you feel, especially about your relationship with Jesus?
- What does it mean to 'draw life from Jesus and the Father'? What are the implications for how we relate to Jesus and one another?
- In what ways have you experienced the Eucharist as a source of strength and new life, enabling you to live Jesus' command of love?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.