

Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 9, 2015

We are continuing our exploration of the last few weeks on the sixth chapter of John, but now our focus turns to how the Eucharist points to the resurrection. Last week we heard Jesus saying: I am the bread of life; no one who comes to me will ever be hungry.

This week's Gospel passage brings introduces a new aspect of Christ's teaching on the Eucharist. Jesus said: I am the *living bread come down from heaven*, whoever eats this bread will live forever.

So Christ teaches us that the bread and wine which appears so insubstantial that we receive at Mass and can appear to be even mundane and boring is in fact one of the principal means by which we will enter eternal life, heaven itself.

This should sound really good to us, a sort of recipe for our lives, if we receive the Lord frequently through our celebration of the sacrament we will ultimately reach the goal we all long for and attain eternal life in heaven. Many preachers over the generations have taught this message and it has become for countless numbers of Catholics the very essence of their faith. After all it is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. The only problem is that they are wrong!

Well, at least we can say they are highly selective. For immediately after this wonderful statement of Jesus that if anyone eats this bread they will live forever; he tells us why this is so: "...because the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

And *that* means suddenly we're confronted with the cross. We become aware of the extraordinary nature and power of what Jesus was saying. We get a glimpse of the depth of the Eucharist itself. And suddenly a simplistic view of the faith is no longer satisfying.

Imagine the scenario from today's Gospel; the Jews are murmuring in protest at Jesus' blasphemous claims to be the Bread that comes down from heaven. It even seems as though Jesus works through with them some of the implications of his statement, but it's obvious that they're lost.

They're lost because they treat Jesus' words as a series of incredible statements that make no sense. But for Jesus the explanations he gives about the Eucharist aren't in any way theoretical, because they are about himself, about his own life. For he knows that the Eucharist is tied up with his death; the Eucharist is itself a powerful symbol of Jesus' death.

So for the Pharisees this was all a lot of abstract theological babble, but to Jesus it was something extraordinarily personal. He was reflecting on the inevitability of his death and trying to help the Jews to see what was going to happen so that they *could* make sense of it.

This must have been very difficult for Jesus because they were talking on two totally different levels, one so abstract, one so personal.

You see, Jesus' life was not a routine one in which he went around preaching a few sermons till he upset so many people that they hauled him off for execution. It was both a life full of death, and a life full of life. He died each day to himself, and each day he lived for others.

So for we who aspire to be authentic disciples, the only way to eternal life then is through the cross, because as disciples of Jesus, we must follow the path that he walked.

Then when we follow his path to and through the cross, the Mass becomes an awesome reminder and symbol of our Christian lives bringing us into direct communion with our Lord and Savior. And in that communion we find the inspiration and the strength and the fellowship to renew our Christian lives and the life of the world.

So the Mass, which may be for some of us an obligation, becomes a celebration and an essential part of our lives.

I would like to close with the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero from the homily he gave just moments before his assassination...

"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. This hope comforts us as Christians. We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses, wants and demands. 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 our people. Let us be intimately united in faith and hope at this moment."