

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 16, 2015

We hear today the very heart of the Bread of Life discourse that we have been listening to for the last four weeks. John's Gospel doesn't relate the institution of the Eucharist narrative at the last supper as it is given to us in the other three Gospels. The ultimate Eucharistic narrative for John happens not at the end of Jesus' life, but right in the middle of His Galilean ministry.

The reason for this is that John is using this entire middle section of His Gospel to show that Jesus is not your average run of the mill miracle worker...He is in fact both human and divine. The Son of Man really has assumed human flesh and not only human appearance.

This is very important because for John's 2nd century community of believers...and for us as well...the Eucharist is a continuation of the incarnation of Jesus: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

Now if we take a closer look at those words, we find that what Jesus said in the original language of the Gospel, Greek, was very strong and explicit. In the original language Jesus didn't just say "eat my flesh" (φαγεῖν) but something much stronger like "chew on my flesh" or "gnaw on my flesh" or "crunch my flesh with your teeth." (τρώγειν) So in the original language of the Gospel the last line of what we heard today reads something like this: "Your ancestors ate the bread that came down from heaven and died but whoever gnaws and crunches on this bread will live forever."

So reading the Gospel in its original language leaves no room for confusion, Jesus really did intend us to understand that the bread of the Eucharist is his flesh. The Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus.

When we receive the Eucharist we're placed in the very life of Christ and Christ's life in us.

But what does this *mean*? How does this teaching of Jesus help us to live *in* the world and not *of* it? How does receiving the Eucharist help make us a people dedicated to life and love for ourselves and for everyone we meet?

Well, we might begin to understand this mystery by trying to understand that during Mass, it's not only bread and wine that are changed...WE are changed! We are purified and transformed.

We may not always FEEL the power of this transformation...but we must always be open to the transforming power of uniting our lives with the very life and essence of Jesus.

The Eucharist is our ticket out of madness...it's our way out of the foolishness that we heard in our first two readings today. It's our ticket out of slavery to sin and evil, untruth, greed, lust, cruelty, boredom...in short the Eucharist rescues us from all of the things that are at the heart of human suffering.

But the Eucharist is so much more than "saving us from" something. There is also a very positive aspect to the Eucharist.

Our full participation in uniting ourselves with Jesus completely and without reservation enables us to be fully human.

I always get a little annoyed when I find myself making a mistake and then say, "Hey, I'm only human"! as if being human was a bad thing and we can only expect bad things because of our humanity.

The fact is, we are all created in God's image and that makes being human a good thing, right?

And the Eucharist is the main ingredient in making all of us better human beings by increasing our thirst for truth, wisdom, loving and forgiving.

But how do we know that we are becoming more fully human? We know we are becoming more authentically human when we begin to love God more and more.

And the criterion for knowing how much we love God is the way we treat our neighbors who are all of those people we encounter everyday of our lives.

A priest once put it very well in a homily when he said, "We do not dare to continue Mass if we don't intend to stop treating each other like strangers!"

And so as we enter into the Eucharistic liturgy, let us recall with hearts filled with gratitude that we are about to enter into an intimate relationship with our savior Jesus Christ who gives Himself completely so that we can live our lives free from the madness and foolishness of the world by giving us new and everlasting life through Him, in Him and with Him and with one another.