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Commentary on the Gospel (with audio version): The Bread from Heaven (Year A)

Gospel for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi (Cycle A), and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 6:51-58)

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.”

Commentary

The gospel for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi contains part of Jesus' discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum about the bread of life; it takes place after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Saint John tells us that Jesus' words about the mysterious future of his Body and Blood cause surprise and rejection in those listening. But the Church has always renewed each day her grateful faith in the real presence of Jesus under the sacramental species. And she continues to encourage processions through city streets so that everyone can adore Him and receive his blessings.

Jesus refers in his discourse to the manna that God made fall from heaven for the Israelites in the desert. "When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the Lord has

given you to eat” (*Ex 16:15*). We Christians should also be amazed at the much more sublime and mysterious gift of the Eucharist, which gives us eternal life.

Jesus explains that the manna in the desert prefigured the true bread from heaven that God was going to give to mankind through his Son. The miracle of the multiplication of loaves also prefigures the Eucharist, and therefore it was the prelude to Jesus’ discourse. But those who ate the manna in the desert died. Jesus invites us to seek the true bread from heaven that quenches our soul’s thirst for God and gives us eternal life—the life of the resurrected Jesus.

When Jesus invited the people to eat and drink his own body and blood, many of his disciples left Him. But the real presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus under the sacramental species is one of the key elements of

our faith. Besides its grounding in New Testament texts, especially Jesus' discourse here and at the Last Supper when instituting the Eucharist, it is also found right from the beginning of the Church. For example, Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote in 90 AD: "They hold aloof from the Eucharist and from services of prayer, because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which, in his goodness, the Father raised."[1]

When commenting on Jesus' discourse, Pope Francis invited us to renew our faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist and to let Christ transform us when we receive Him: "the bread really is his Body given up for us, the wine really is his Blood poured out for us. The Eucharist is Jesus himself who gives himself entirely to us. *Nourishing ourselves* from Him and *abiding* in Him

through Eucharistic Communion, if we do so with faith, *transforms our life*, transforms it into a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. Nourishing ourselves from that ‘Bread of Life’ means entering into harmony with the heart of Christ, assimilating his choices, his thoughts, his behavior. It means entering into a dynamism of love and becoming people of peace, people of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of sharing in solidarity. The very things that Jesus did.”[2]

Saint Josemaria said: “Our God has decided to stay in the tabernacle to nourish us, strengthen us, make us divine and give effectiveness to our work and efforts.”[3] And he continued: “If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord’s body, we should *show* it. Let us pray that our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us pray that we be true and clear in what we

say—the right thing at the right time
—so as to console and help and
especially bring God’s light to others.
Let us pray that our actions be
consistent and effective and right, so
that they give off ‘the good fragrance
of Christ,’ evoking his way of doing
things.”[4]

[1] Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 7.

[2] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 16 August 2015.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 151.

[4] *Ibid.*, no. 156.

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