

Weekly Edition – October 20, 2017
Gospel According to St. John – Second Year

Jesus the Bread of Life

²²The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

³²Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

⁴¹At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

⁵³ Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Entering Into Scripture: A Meditation on the Bread of Life

I awake tired this morning. I feel emotionally drained from yesterday. I think about what I witnessed – five thousand ate from a few loaves and two pickled sardines. Then the storm last night. The struggle for life. Then Jesus coming to us walking on the water. It is too much to take it all in.

It is early. There is now no sign of the storm that mercilessly battered us last night. It is a clear morning. The sun has begun to run its course. The early morning air is crisp and sunlight sparkles out on the sea like a million diamonds. As we finish breakfast, Jesus tells us we are heading for the synagogue and explains that He will be teaching again today.

While that's not really news, I am feeling very much filled-up. My brain is full. I don't think I can take any more, and I sure don't want another day like yesterday. Since my decision to leave John the Baptizer and follow Jesus – now over a year ago – my whole world has been rocked!

My heart sinks as we round the corner on our way to the synagogue. Already a throng is forming. From this perch we have a good view

down to the water. I see boats loaded with people who have followed us from yesterday. It is a few more days until the wheat harvest, so people have no work to tend to, and that means they have plenty of time on their hands. It is going to be another circus, I say to myself.

As soon as the crowd sees Jesus, a visible excitement shoots through the square. "Rabbi, when did You get here?" one asks.

"Truly you are looking for Me not because of the signs you saw Me perform, but because of the free picnic you were served," Jesus replied. "Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life that the Son of Man will give you. On Him, the Father has set His seal of approval." Jesus continues stepping forward until He reaches the base of the stone staircase that leads up to the synagogue. He stops and turns to face the people.

"What must we do to do the works God requires?" someone asks. The crowd hushes. Anticipation builds.

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Jesus scans the faces in the growing crowd before giving reply: "The work of God is this: believe in the One He has sent."

That answer seemed insufficient to them. They wanted proof that Jesus had authority. So, they pressed Him, asking, "What sign will You give us that we may see it and believe You?"

My heart sinks. Are you kidding me? Are you so blind to have missed what happened on the hill yesterday? Did you pause, even for a second, to consider where all the bread and fish came from to serve so many in a remote place? How can you ask for a sign?

But the crowd pressed their case saying, "Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness."

Precisely! You dolts. Open your eyes. My impatience grows, but I say nothing. I can feel my pulse racing.

"Truly I say, it was not Moses that gave you bread from heaven. It is My Father that gives the true bread of heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world," Jesus calmly replied. He showed no sign of the frustration welling up inside of me.

The crowd continues to grow as more and more pour into the square. Jesus turns takes three steps up. He turns to the people again. I move up two steps with Him. Jesus looks over the crowd. Priests. Teachers of the law. Wealthy. Poor. City folk. Farmers. I see a detachment of Roman soldiers come into the square and stop. They keep their distance, but their presence is duly-noted. There will be no riots here today.

"Sir," one older man speaks up, "always give us some of that bread." The crowd nods in consent.

Just like I thought! Once You started this free buffet it is going to be hard to stop it, I mumble to myself. I'm no son of God and yet I can figure that out...

Jesus drew in a slow deep breath. Then He began speaking. You could hear a pin drop. As He

spoke, His voice carried out into the square. Everyone hung on His every word – including me.

"I am the Bread of Life." He paused and let His words sink in, before continuing. "Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry." Pause. "And whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty." Pause. "But as I have told you, you have seen Me and you still do not believe. All those the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me...I will not drive away."

My mind flashes back to that day nearly a year ago when, with that hand-braided whip, Jesus drove all the merchants out of the Temple courtyard.

Jesus continues, "I have come to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of the One who sent Me – that I shall lose none of those given to Me, but I will raise them up on the last day."

None of us have ever heard anyone speak like this before. My agitation at the crowd begins to melt away as I listen to Him. It is short-lived.

The crowd begins to murmur and grumble, "How can He say He is bread come down from heaven? He is Mary's boy – a carpenter. We know where You are from! It's not heaven!"

Jesus reacted to the crowd. He seemed more sad than upset – like their unbelief was breaking His heart. "Stop grumbling. It is written in the prophets, "They will be taught by God."

"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of heaven. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness but died. But here is the bread come down from heaven which anyone may eat and not die." Jesus spoke slowly. With authority. His words filled the square.

I don't get it. My frustration with the people gives way to my own confusion. What is He saying? I just don't get it.

Jesus continues, "I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will

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live forever. This bread is My flesh which I give for the life of the world."

With that, the crowd erupted. I catch the movement of the Roman garrison as they step forward as if expecting a riot to break out. People shout out. Some jeer. Some are just angry. As for me, I am deeply troubled. "Eat this bread." "This bread is my flesh." My mind is frozen – seized-up like the mind-knot that forms trying to solve a Rubik's Cube. My heart sinks. I don't understand why He has to say these things. It was all going so well a minute ago.

"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. My flesh is real food, and My blood is real drink."

Ew! Yuk! Gross! Totally repulsive! Sickening! Grotesque! I can't even go there. Drink someone's blood? Eat their flesh? News flash: never gonna happen! Not me! No cannibals in my tribe – certainly not me!

Then suddenly my revulsion gives way to a new thought. Wow. I nearly missed it. Now I see. Jesus just shut down the free buffet. Whatever hunger was stirring a minute ago simply vanished. I am not hungry anymore, I am

Reflection 1: The Search

Lord Jesus, You excited among those on the opposite shore an earnest desire to be with You. When in the morning they realized You were not with them and had departed, they went all out in their efforts to locate You, even traveling by sea to get to Capernaum, where You were. Though their motives were misplaced in searching for food rather than signs, their zeal to

nauseated. Way to go, Jesus! Never saw that one coming.

Jesus speaks up again, raising His voice to match the din of the crowd. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in them." His voice is steady; His words emphatic.

Spoiler alert: this isn't going well. I see some in the crowd turn and walk away, grumbling as they leave. A few make their way forward. The Roman garrison steps back. Only a handful remain.

"What about you?" Jesus asks. "Do you want to leave Me too?"

I am too confused to answer. This isn't so much fun anymore. I am not sure what my answer would be.

Peter speaks up: "Lord, where would we go?" Peter casts his eyes to the ground as if searching for the right words. He looks up to Jesus. "You have the words of eternal life." Peter continues to look at Jesus as he musters the courage to let it out. "We have come to know and believe You are the Holy One of God."

Whoa! Thank you, Peter! You just gave me – gave us all – the hall pass. Now I don't need to answer. I am not sure what my answer would be.

find You was real. In our own day the zeal expressed in our culture is not simply to distance ourselves from you, but to deny You altogether. We are in such great need of revival. If only You would raise up prophets to excite men and women in our own day to seek You, find You and know You.

Application: *What in my example and manner of living would excite another to search for Jesus?*

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Reflection 2: Willingness and Most Holy Bread

Bread is necessary for life. It gives strength and nourishment to our bodies that grow faint without it. Among those with You that morning in Capernaum were a great many whose hearts were fixed on satisfying the very real needs of our bodies. You confirmed this by feeding them with barley loaves a day earlier. But now You point us towards a different kind of sustenance – one very much needed by all – spiritual food. The bread of heaven. The Israelites surely knew about this bread. Every Sabaoth, according to the law You gave through Moses, twelve loaves of Most Holy bread were baked according to the

requirements of the law. These were placed in the Holy of Holies and arranged on a gold-covered “showbread table.” These loaves were called the “Bread of Presence.” They remained here for the week until being replaced by fresh loaves. Once removed, only priests could eat the Showbread. All of this was hidden away, deep within Your Sanctuary. But here You are – the Bread of Heaven – standing among Your people. You present the Showbread to all. You offer the Most Holy Bread to anyone who was willing to receive it. Your presence is hidden within this Bread – the Bread of Life.

Application: What does it mean to me that Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life?

Reflection 3: Only One Work is Necessary

The people respond to Your re-direction. They ask what works must be done to please God. They use the plural, expecting to hear many such works: their minds were filled with Ten Commandments and 612 statutes from the Law of Moses. You answer in the singular – there is only one necessary work: to believe in the One whom God has sent. In this one work is

contained all the others. In this simplicity there is divine elegance which only God can fashion. Do this one work, and all other works are satisfied. Do this one and there is none else for us to do, since in it, all other works are rendered complete. And without this one, all of the others together combined are as good as none whatsoever.

Application: What do I add or subtract from the one thing?