

**13 PENTECOST**  
**August 19, 2018**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,  
 taught us the meaning of unconditional love.  
 AMEN**

Last Sunday we considered the Gospel theme of Jesus as the Bread of Life. And now, in the Gospel today, we hear Jesus say that he is the “**Living** Bread.” For me, this is absolutely the essential heart of our worship together as we share the Holy Eucharist, our Holy Communion. It helps to begin to understand what Jesus is saying if we keep in mind that Jesus knows that he does not have much time left to be physically present with his disciples...and we can hear his yearning for them to know his Real Presence continuing even beyond his life upon this earth.

Actually, **we** may know this desire from our own experience in life in the ways **WE** try to stay present with those we love. In fact, one of the most necessary elements of human love is presence. When we love someone we want to be near that person, to be **with** that person. On those sad occasions when we have to be apart from loved ones, for whatever reason, we try our best to keep in touch one way or another. If the separation is caused by death, even then we still try to stay connected through pictures, through stories and memories...anything that will be a strong reminder of our loving presence to each other.

To me, this would seem to be a big reason why Jesus spoke these words about Himself being the Living Bread. He was speaking about how we can remain united with our Lord, how we can be with him, how we can remain in His presence. Jesus said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” To consider Jesus Christ as bread from heaven, to eat and drink as we do in the Eucharist is to appropriate, to assimilate, to **ABIDE** in Jesus Christ.

Of course, this is all quite **MYSTICAL**; it is not to be understood by our rational minds, but somehow it is to be known by our very souls, our spirits. In the book, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avilla proclaims, “God’s Castle and chosen dwelling place is precisely the beauty of the human soul.” And Richard Rohr, quite the Spiritual Guru, has written, “The Holy Eucharist is much more than a theological statement that requires intellectual assent. Rather, the Eucharist is an invitation to experience the shared presence of God, and for us to be present to that in an absolutely total way.”

Our Lord continues using the image of Bread to speak of his mission. And, today’s Gospel passage opens with the shocking revelation of the price of his gift to us of the bread of life. Jesus says, “*The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*”

It is highly unlikely that a single soul in the crowd understood what they were hearing. When the people ask, “How **CAN** this man give us his flesh to eat,” we hear genuine puzzlement. What can he mean when he says, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” Jesus continues to speak more and more explicitly about the high cost of his mission. We now know better what he meant. Not because we are wiser or more understanding than the people in the crowd, but because time has taught us the power and the beauty, indeed the

symbolism and the deep meaning of what we now know as Holy Communion, our Holy Eucharist.

I hope we don't get stuck on the actual words and miss the gift of their deep meaning for our lives. I hope we don't take the words so absolutely literally as a little boy in one of my earlier churches did. This was before I was ordained to the Priesthood, so I was the Chalice Bearer, following along after the priest, serving Communion. This very well-mannered little boy, maybe about eight years old, had just started receiving Communion with his parents. So, there he was at the altar rail with them, and after the Priest gave him the communion bread, I came along with the chalice and said, "The Blood of Christ, The Cup of Salvation." At which the little guy crossed his arms over his chest and said, "I don't care for any blood. Thank you."

It is an incredible realization that if Jesus is to be the food, the bread from which we may know our resurrected life, our eternal life, then Jesus must be sacrificed, broken and die.

Now, while we, in our age, don't readily grasp this idea of sacrifice, for the listeners in Jesus' time, the understanding of sacrifice would be taken for granted. All of the religions of that time had some form of sacrifice. And in the sacrifice, only a part was burned or offered to the god. A portion was given to the priest and the rest was consumed by the giver, along with family and friends. They believed that the spirit of their god actually **inhabited** the sacrifice that was consumed by the worshippers.

One time when I was on a Spiritual Retreat in Abiquiu, New Mexico, Georgia O'Keeffe's territory, we had the rare privilege of being invited to a Navajo Pueblo and to a corn dance before Elk hunting. We learned that the revered head of the tribe was also the Elk Hunter, and he was setting out just before dawn. He was known far and wide for his skill at hunting elk, so we were eager to hear from him. He told us, very reverently, that when he selected the elk he was to kill, he would be in communion with its Spirit, and actually thank the Elk for its sacrifice, for the good of the village. It still is an amazing notion to me, and this concept may seem gross to modern ears, but it relays an important truth. True religion means receiving the Spirit of God within our very being, which is what our Holy Eucharist is all about. It is having this Spirit within us that gives us that abundant life, indeed that JOY in life that our Lord wants for us.

Another important truth of our Eucharist is that if bread is to be shared, it must be broken. The ritual of our Holy Eucharist highly dramatizes the breaking of the bread in order to show that it is essentially in our brokenness that we are enabled to truly share in the Eucharistic fellowship.// It is our awareness that everyone carries some burden.// It is through our brokenness that we become a part of the community of sufferers, those who know deeply how suffering adds a deeper dimension to all of life, if we will let it. // And how it is that through suffering, we know more readily the pain others have. Think of the reality of this in Alcoholics Anonymous. The bond between recovering alcoholics and their sponsors is so strong, so life-giving, because they both GET IT about the other's suffering.

And, indeed, WE are ALL broken/wounded in some way. A wonderful theologian and spiritual writer of our time, Henri Nouwen, wrote a number of books on this theme. His most notable was *The Wounded Healer* in which he states that it is precisely in, and through, our own

woundedness that we may become a source of life and blessing for others.///// So, the issue becomes: Will we, as we say in our Eucharistic Prayer in Rite I, offer OURSELVES, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice to God...so that he CAN bless us just as we are, that our wounds, our pain, may indeed bind us to others and to a deeper understanding of God in Jesus as OUR Wounded Healer...that we may be filled with his grace and heavenly benediction and made one body with him that he may dwell in us... and we in Him... and then ... send us forth, restored ...to serve the Lord our God by serving others?

Jesus can only be our Life Source, our Living Bread if we will come to **know** him...if we will truly let him in our lives. He can only bless our brokenness if we trustingly offer our life, broken as it is, to him. Just as the very familiar hymn says, "Just as I am without one plea, O Lamb of God, I come to thee." The **offer** of blessing and wholeness is there for us. **We need** to recognize our Lord's call to wholeness and, with no fear, come to Him./// / Just imagine Jesus Christ in every aspect of your life. Imagine him in your relationships, your conversations, your decisions, your opinions, your use of time. Jesus says, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you!" He knows well what we need. And we experience this time and again in the power and beauty of what we have come to know as the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus says to us, as he said so long ago to Doubting Thomas, "Do not be faithless, but be believing." He assures us that the TRUE BREAD gives life. It is life changing. We are no longer alone or bound by our past, or held by guilt or sorrow///. Hopefully we will continue in our own Spiritual Journey to know a deeper receptivity to the message of the Holy Eucharist, to let words and understanding be less important, to strive to take in the REAL Presence of God in Jesus Christ, more than to understand it. And especially, may we ourselves be more truly present to the REAL Presence of our Lord being offered to us.

As you experience Holy Communion this morning, as you receive the sacred bread and wine, may you experience in a deeper way, the mystical communion with Christ, His Real Presence, and God's Love for you. May it be so more and more, day by day, for each of us.

AMEN