

**12 Pentecost
August 15, 2021**

**In the name of God the Father,
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**

In the Gospel for today, from the Gospel according to John, Jesus says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them."

We have to realize that first century Jews had the same feeling toward cannibalism as we do. It was abhorrent to them. In fact, some of those who had been disciples of Jesus stopped following Him because of these words.

What Jesus was saying is that you draw your spiritual strength from me. As He says in John's Gospel, "I am the vine; you are the branches." You draw your spiritual strength from me. Just as bread gives physical strength to the body, Jesus gives us spiritual strength.

All our faith as Christians revolve around Jesus. I read somewhere that the difference between Islam and Christianity is that in Islam, a man points to a book whereas in Christianity, a book points to a man.

Muslims believe that their holy book the Koran was dictated by God's angel word for word in Arabic to Muhammad. Muhammad points to the Koran as the center of Muslims' faith. As Christians, however, we believe that our sacred book, the Bible, points to Jesus as the center of our faith. The Old Testament is books preparing for the coming of the Messiah, and the books of the New Testament are about the Messiah, namely Jesus.

So Jesus is much more than a great moral teacher. 69 years ago in 1952, a book was published entitled *Mere Christianity* by the famous Christian writer C.S. Lewis. In the book, Lewis writes that we cannot say that Jesus was just a great moral teacher.

Lewis writes, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing people often say about Him (Jesus): 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call

Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

But if Jesus is the center of our faith, our Christian faith is not something just between you and Jesus. To have Jesus be the center of your life is to be part of His body in the world which is the Christian Church.

Now I have heard people say - and so have you - “I don’t have to go to church to experience God. I can experience God just as well by walking in the woods or walking on the beach or on the golf course as in any church. And it is true that you can find God in the woods or on the beach or on the golf course, although usually on the golf course God’s name is not used in prayer.

But if that is the only place that you search for God, what you will create is your own private god. It is a tame god. It is a god who always makes you feel comfortable and make no demands on you. The problem is that it is not the real God. It is an idol. To experience the real God is to worship with other Christians in the Church.

And to worship God in Church has many benefits, more than can be covered in one sermon, but I will mention two. One is that in Church we share in the sacraments of the Church such as the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist that we are celebrating right now. In fact the reference in today’s Gospel to eating Christ’s body and drinking His blood is a clear reference to the Holy Eucharist. As we eat the bread and drink the wine in memory of Jesus - and we will drink the wine again when this covid business is over - Jesus spiritually strengthens us. There is so much to say about the Holy Eucharist. There is far more than can be covered in one sermon.

Also, in Church, we pray for each other. I remember when I was going through a difficult time in my ministry, I knew that many people were praying for me. One Sunday I was leading worship and we had just begun reciting the Nicene Creed when I felt myself being lifted up. Physically, my feet were still on the floor, but I could feel the prayers of others spiritually lift me up. As I said, there are so many benefits to being part of a Church. Many more than can be covered in one sermon.

In the second lesson for today, Saint Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is what we do in the Church and it reinforces for us that Jesus is the center of our lives as Christians.

Let us pray: Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow His steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our

Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

Amen.
