

Eternal Life Now!
20B 2012

For the past month we have been reading from a section of Saint John's Gospel called, "The Bread of Life Discourse." This teaching is occasioned by Jesus' feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness. Although he feeds them, the crowd does not understand that he has performed more than a miracle—he has given them a sign that points to himself as the Bread of Life. Nevertheless, when the people find Jesus, they challenge him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?" They remind him—as if he had forgotten—that when their ancestors were in the wilderness, Moses fed them with bread from heaven. In response, Jesus tells them that *God is now giving them the true bread from heaven*. And it is at this point that Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life, the one who has come down from heaven for the life of the world.

As he begins his teaching, Jesus makes this astounding statement: Anyone who comes to him will never hunger, and whoever believes in him will never thirst; for he is the bread from heaven. This is too much, and so the crowd murmurs that they know Jesus. They know his mother, they know his father. They know Jesus all too well—or so they think. How can he, the one they know, be the living bread that he has come down from heaven?

It is at this point that Jesus makes the statement we hear in today's gospel. Having disclosed that he *is* the bread of life that the Father has sent into the world, Jesus reveals that he will give his flesh for the life of the world. Jesus will surrender his life so that world may have life. Jesus will give his flesh so that those who believe in him may have God's Spirit.

When the crowd objects that this is impossible; Jesus goes further. He reveals that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood *already have* eternal life, and he will raise them up on the last day. Notice that Jesus does *not* say that those who eat his body and drink his blood *will have*

eternal life. He says they *already have* eternal life. And because they *already have* eternal life, Jesus will raise them up on the last day.

With these words, Jesus reveals something about the Eucharist we often overlook. By participating in the Eucharist we have eternal life—God’s own life—within us. And because we already have the seed of eternal life within us, Christ will raise us up the last day. The Eucharist, then, is Jesus’ pledge and assurance to us that he will raise us up on the last day.

Nutritionists tell us that we are what we eat. If we eat food that lacks nutrition, if we indulge in junk food, we will eventually destroy health. It is not surprising, then, we are more and more careful these days about what we eat and drink. We count calories. We monitor our intake of sodium. We avoid eating fatty foods. But no matter how careful we are, the food we eat cannot give us the fullness of life. Nor will it preserve us unto eternal life. Sooner or later, no matter how careful we are, our body will age and decay.

But the food that Christ gives in the Eucharist is different because he is the bread of life that has come down from heaven. If we eat this bread, we will live. If we eat this food, we have eternal life. If we eat this bread, Christ will raise us up on the last day. If we eat this food, we become Christ. If we eat this bread we will be conformed to Christ. If we eat this food, we will grow into resurrection life.

In a few moments, we will receive the Eucharist. And when we do we will be incorporated into the body of Christ. We will receive Christ, but more importantly, Christ will receive us into his body. This is Christ’s pledge to us that he will raise us up on the last day.

As we receive this Eucharist, then, we ask for the grace to become like the one whom we receive and into whom we are incorporated. We ask for the grace to be conformed to the pattern of his saving-death and life-giving resurrection.