

Homily on John 6: 56-69

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

“Those who eat my flesh, and drink my blood, abide in me, and I in them.”

I don't believe I will ever forget the day, when I worshipped for the first time, at a Eucharist with the Book of Common Prayer. Having only been exposed to the Book of Alternative Services, and other liturgies like it, I remember being shocked at the language used in the BCP.

Parts of it I wasn't sure I understood, while other parts made *some* sense, but as the closing of the service approached, I found myself *taken aback* at the blatancy of the words, spoken by the congregation as a whole: “...so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed with his most precious blood...”

Having been raised Roman Catholic, with a working understanding of transubstantiation, I had never been opposed to receiving the 'Body of Christ' at communion – but *eating flesh* and *drinking blood*, put so literally in this way, well it definitely brought a sick feeling to my stomach.

Knowing how this experience made *me* feel – I can only imagine the trepidation upon the lips and thoughts of Jesus disciples, as they heard this difficult teaching.

The murmurs would have begun quite quickly as the disciples began to complain, “I don't care what Jesus says; Jewish law forbids it!”

“The Rabbi is starting to lose his mind; does he even know what he's

asking of us?" "This Jesus is pretty great guy; I love him, I really do – but let me tell you, I am not *that* hungry."

Well, they were *that hungry*, days earlier, when He fed the five thousand. They were *that hungry*, months earlier, when He filled their nets so full of fish. Like any good Anglican, Jesus had filled their *stomachs* with God's abundance, plentiful and without measure, but now, He would offer them food for their souls.

As many of you know, I spent two long weeks in hospital last month. After suffering from a number of Gall Bladder attacks, I found myself in a hospital bed suffering from a painful case of Pancreatitis. During this time, I was not permitted to eat any food or consume any drink. Whether it was before the ERCP procedure, or after the diagnosis of Pancreatitis; I was told again and again, by both Doctors and Nurses alike, that I was not allowed to consume anything.

For those of you who know me well, you know, *I like my food*. And I know most of you tend to think I'm a pretty nice guy, but just ask Heather how pleasant I become after a mere few days without any food.

For Jesus disciples *this* was a daily struggle. When you follow around a first century nomadic preacher, it's not so easy to find a Tim Horton's for a quick snack. The men and women, who followed Jesus, put their faith in Him, that He would not let them starve; faith He would provide for their needs.

I wonder what the response of the disciples would have been; if Jesus had changed his teaching that day. What if he had woken that morning, and said, 'Let's feed all those people again. Who has bread? Who has fishes? Let's multiply them and have another feast!'

Time and again, they were hungry enough, to ask Jesus to fill their stomachs, and quench their bodily needs. But for many, they were not yet hungry enough, to be fed, with this bread for their souls. For many, they could not see past the comforts of *this* world; for many, they were unable to prepare their hearts, for the coming of eternity.

After many had left, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom can we go? *You* have the words of eternal life." Likely confused and little scared of the place their leader was now taking them. Peter and the apostles, who remained, still said, 'Lord, *we* want to be fed.'

We as Christians have a terrible tendency to do a major disservice to each other, and to the gospel, when we attempt to preach a message of individual salvation. Peter speaks of eternal life, and too often Christendom hears 'getting into heaven.'

Peter has heard so many times, his Lord proclaim the coming of the kingdom, and the salvation *which is* eternal life. Peter has heard Jesus tell of a place, where we will live in God's future.

A kingdom of eternal life where the lion shall sleep next to the lamb; a kingdom of eternal life where the orphan will always be taken in; a kingdom of eternal life, where violence shall be no more, with no more tears, and no more crying, for God will be all, in all.

Peter and the other apostles do not stay with Jesus because they like the misunderstood idea of eating flesh or drinking blood. Nor do they stay, because they believe if they do so, they will reserve their spot in heaven.

They stay, because they have already tasted bread, which reveals such a kingdom; they stay, because they have already sipped on a cup, which makes known of such a place. They have already begun to see the fruits, of the trees, of eternal life – and they want another taste.

The bread which *we* feed on, is the bread which *is* life; it is the bread which is Jesus true body. It is a bread not of manna, of wheat, or of flesh, but a bread which is born out of love. A bread which is broken, a bread which is blessed; love, to be feasted on, by us all.

As the days of my hospital stay grew longer, and more difficult, I began to experience much frustration, and much need; it was a sense of brokenness, which I had truly never expected to come. I did not want to see anyone, and I just wanted to be left alone.

But from amidst my hunger, my pain, and too much medication, as I lay awake in my bed; a parishioner, and a friend, came into my room, knelt next to me, and, with reverence, began to pray. Never asking me for permission, or ever needing me to say a word, he simply offered alleviation from my pain.

Praying for my recovery, asking God for His healing hands; bread, which I was desperately in need. And without a morsel of food before us, or without one drop of wine, my friend shared with me, in Christ's Eucharist.

We are bread, blessed by the Lord, broken and shared, life for the world. **We** are wine, love freely poured; **we** are one in the Lord.¹

Thanks be to God.

¹ Let us be bread by Thomas Porter