

+ In Nomine Jesu +

John 6:51-69

Date: August 18, 2024

Liturgical Date: Pentecost 10B (Proper 12)

Title: Jesus feeds the flesh

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

This is a hard saying. This man speaks about flesh, that we should, we must eat this flesh. Will this flesh be served to us as a steak or a roast, for all of us? A butcher may cut up a cow, a large animal, and fill the meat case, but the cow's flesh only goes so far. Now this man says whoever feeds on my flesh has eternal life. How much flesh does he have to go around? What is his flesh for so many? And when - or if - the last day comes, how is his flesh going to help my dead, rotting flesh? This is a hard saying.

This body, this flesh needs to eat. We eat daily, as God graciously grants daily bread, sufficient for the day. Without that food, the body would die. With food, the body keeps going, for a little bit at least. Then, soon, the body is hungry again, needing food to stave off death approaching. Eat, then hunger, eat, then hunger, then die. Even with daily bread, the body dies.

Jesus proclaims, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." The living bread comes down from heaven itself. During the Exodus, bread came from heaven to feed Israel in the wilderness. The ground was covered with flakes. What is it? Manna. But they ate manna in the wilderness and died.

Bread has come down from heaven before. Jesus says something new and hard. This living bread comes down from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever. Now the bread is living bread. Now the bread is "my flesh", says Jesus, "my flesh for the life of the world."

Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world. Whoever eats of this bread, this flesh, will live forever. Then the disputes fire up. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" How does his flesh give life to our flesh? The disputers know how frail their own flesh is. What good is flesh if it always needs to be fed and nourished? Flesh needs more food to stay alive - whether the food is bread or the food is flesh - meat.

How can this man, this one man, give us, all of us, his flesh to eat? The disputers tried to rationalize Jesus' words with their minds. How can this man give flesh to eat? Is there a butcher who would do this? And obviously this man would be dead for him to give us his flesh to eat? And there's only so much of his flesh to go around for anyone who would eat it. He says it is for the life of the world - so everyone can eat of this flesh? So much rationalizing. So many questions.

They heard the words Jesus was speaking. Bread. Heaven. Life. Forever. Flesh. But there was one little word that Jesus used which makes possible everything that Jesus says. Jesus

talks about flesh. He adds the word “My” to flesh. “My flesh.” The flesh that Jesus talks about is not the usual human flesh. The usual human flesh is subject to death. So much of what happens to us is just death on its way. Whether we have hunger pains or sickness or are hurt or just growing old, all of those are reminders that this flesh, our flesh, will die. Sooner or later, who knows, but this flesh, our flesh, is death.

Jesus says, “My flesh.” The word became flesh. The word through whom all things were made became flesh. The word that spoke into being everything in existence. The word that prepared the garden full of trees - trees pleasant to the sight and good for food. The word prepared all of creation to sustain man, to sustain the flesh. The word created the tree of life in the midst of the garden. The word gave life to man. That word became the “My flesh” that Jesus speaks of.

But after the word created all things, Adam and Eve sought food from other sources. You will not surely die, says the serpent. Lies. Apart from God, there is no life, only death. The fatal fruit looked good to the eyes. However, what the eyes see and what the mind rationalizes can deceive. The serpent knows how easily deceived man is. The serpent appeals to the eyes - it looks beautiful. The serpent appeals to the mind - you will be like God. Flesh without God, without the word, is dead.

God has come, in the flesh, to bring life to all flesh. For in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. The flesh of Christ is the flesh of the life-giving creator. When Jesus says, “My flesh”, his flesh is able to bring life to all flesh. Flesh without God is dead. So God comes in the flesh to bring life to all flesh. Jesus gives bread to the world. Jesus is so generous with this bread and his flesh is so overwhelming with life, that he gives this bread, his flesh, for the life of the world.

It still sounds too hard. How can this man give his flesh to eat? Do we even have a need to eat this flesh? Are there other ways to eternal life? Eternal life ought to be sensible and rational. If I can find the way to eternal life, that seems to make more sense than whatever this man is saying. Eat his flesh? Nonsense! How about something sensible, like a way for nice people to find eternal life, for all the good moral people? How about... good people should go to heaven. A lot of people believe that and live like that. It sounds easier than what Jesus is speaking about. But following the easy is the way to death of the flesh.

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” There is no easy way to find eternal life that makes sense. There is no other way to eternal life except the Son of Man. Eat the flesh. Drink the blood. Or else no life. The Son of Man is the source of life. The Son of Man is God in the flesh. Yes, he has human flesh. Yes God has blood. He gives this flesh and this blood for the life of the world.

The Son of Man is lifted up on the cross. His flesh is nailed to the wood. His blood pours out from his hands and feet and side. His flesh is cut off from God. The Son of Man is forsaken by God. His flesh dies on behalf of the world. Your flesh should be dead. Not his flesh. He is the living bread that came down from heaven. Jesus has come to give life.

Death cannot still Jesus' flesh. His blood will flow again. The living bread lives, coming out of the tomb. His flesh is raised from the dead. His flesh is not subject to death any more. He is the living bread. Life overtakes death. Death is so strong that nothing can escape its grasp, save the Son of Man.

Now the Son of Man gives his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Everyone who eats his flesh and drinks his blood will also be released from death into eternal life. So how to partake of his flesh and his blood? He gives you his word to feast on, so full of promises. I will raise you up on the last day. Feast on that beautiful promise. In baptism, we participate in Christ being put to death and we participate in Christ being raised again. And the life that the Son of Man promises is given out in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus' words are full of life. And how beautiful are the words, "I will raise him up on the last day"? Your flesh matters to Jesus. This flesh that we have - this flesh where we are fully aware of the death that is coming - will be raised. Jesus' death means life for you, for your body. Jesus' words feed you with that life - I will raise you on the last day.

A life for a life seems rational, trading one life for another. But Jesus says, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." The word becomes flesh to give life to your flesh. Your flesh is not worthless, meaningless, "just a shell." Your flesh will live. The life that Jesus gives is without limit. Whoever feeds... How does the life of one man in the flesh feed everyone who eats of that flesh? How is the life of Christ for you?

Look at the abundance that Christ hands out to feed the large crowds at the beginning of John 6. Jesus saw the large crowds following him. He knew how he would provide for them and feed them. The only food that the disciples could find was the five loaves and the two fish, but what were they for so many? Jesus' desire to give life to this crowd is unbounded, more than enough for so many. The crowd is completely satisfied. The twelve baskets are full. Nobody is left lacking.

When Jesus promises, "I will raise him up on the last day," the living bread is for you in that same abundance. Nothing will be lacking for you on the last day. Only the living bread, Jesus, gives eternal life and a resurrection on the last day. However hard the teaching seems to be, do not go to anyone else besides Jesus. However far away the last day seems to be, keep feeding on Jesus, his words, his promises, his life for you.

With the last day coming - soon - then how ought we to live as those fed by the flesh and blood of the Son of Man? We live as those who will be raised on the last day. The resurrection of the body is a most comforting word from Jesus. Jesus has come down from heaven to give eternal life to the body.

We abide in Christ and his word. We take courage in this life knowing that the promises of Christ must be true - that he will raise us on the last day. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." The words that we devour from Jesus bring us life even now. We abide in Christ, and Christ in us. In that sense we are already raised even now.

St. Paul writes to the Ephesians concerning the Christian life. “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Eating Christ’s flesh is the difference between life and having no life, between alive and dead. St. Paul uses the imagery of light and darkness. Life and death are separate. Light and darkness are separate. The works of those who are alive and in the light are separate from the works of those who are dead and in darkness.

The days are evil, as St. Paul reports. The works of darkness are all around. Do not be deceived by the evil. Do not be conformed to a world that is consumed with death. Take courage in these evil days. Surely as we abide in Christ and he in us, we live without fear. Whatever we suffer, Jesus suffers with us. He has fed us with his own flesh. They did the worst that they could to Jesus - crucified him. Jesus is raised and lives. What can man do to us? Take courage, for we eat the living bread.

Many will walk away from Christ. They may find his teaching too hard. The life that Jesus gives may seem too irrational - God became flesh? Others may turn away because they see no value in the flesh - this flesh is worthless, not worth saving. God wouldn’t come in the flesh to save worthless flesh. Others may find the food that Jesus gives is too free. They cannot fathom that something so satisfying as true food and true drink would be given without cost. They want to earn the food to eat.

Yet the meal is prepared and served by God. Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight. Come, for everything is now ready. Wisdom prepares the meal and invites you away from this foolish world. The meal is ready even for those who have nothing. The sacrifice has been slaughtered. The blood has been poured out. Eat and drink. Eternal life is for you.

Do you want to go away as well? Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Where else could we go for eternal life? Every human philosophy is not for eternal life. A philosophy that drives one to live a pure and clean lifestyle is doomed to fail. A philosophy that is “live and let live, do whatever you want” decays into disobedience followed by the wrath of God. Riches cannot buy eternal life. Nobody can reason or rationalize their own way to acquire eternal life. All of our technology and AI have only conditioned us to believe everything is fake and manipulated by the algorithm.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. The words of Jesus are spirit and life. God has become flesh, to draw men to himself. God becomes flesh to feed his own creation, to feed men for eternal life. God prepares the meal. God sends his Son, the bread from heaven who gives his own flesh for the life of the world. And he will raise you up on the last day.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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