

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

11th June 2023 - Corpus Christi

Readings: 1st: Deuteronomy 8:2-3,14-16. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Gospel: John 6:51-58. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink

You could say, I suppose that Adam & Eve ate their way out of paradise. Jesus, who was reversing the fall of Adam, thought up a way of eating our way back into the fulness of life. Ever since Adam's day people have hungered in body and spirit.

Bread for the support of bodily life is earned in sweat and toil, as Genesis 3 reminds us. We used to speak of earning our daily bread – even a dry crust! But even this hard-earned bread was not sufficient to meet the hunger of the spirit. People have not always been able to identify what they hunger for.

Moses explained to the people how God schooled them through 40 years of desert experience, as our 1st reading reminds us; *“He humbled you, he made you feel hunger, he fed you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to make you understand that man does not live on bread alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of God.”*

The Old Testament had used the imagery of hunger and thirst with reference to the gift of wisdom. *“Those who eat me will hunger still, those who drink me with thirst for more.” (Sir 24:21).*

The water from the well in Samaria did not give eternal satisfaction, whereas the water Jesus promised would be an undying satisfaction. Similarly, the wisdom of the Old Testament writer did not promise eternal food and drink, but the teaching of Jesus did promise eternal satisfaction.

Roman emperors sought to distract the minds of people from their social injustices by placating them with bread and circuses. Nowadays consumerism and changing fashions create hollow needs which obscure the serious searchings of life.

Entertainment has become a highly paid profession in an effort to distract the restless mind. The very obsession with endless communication has borne poisoned fruit in restlessness, loneliness, impermanent relationships, dependence on chemical or alcoholic support, suicides and a wide menu of outlandish beliefs in such substitutes as astral powers, the spirit of trees or the power of stones.

Belief in Jesus is the only way to eternal life, to a life which transcends death, to values that are permanent, to a meaning which holds all the parts of life in unity. The centre holds fast, the foundation is firm, and that house is not swept away.

The words of Jesus express the eternal wisdom of God, food of eternal salvation.

In St John's longest and great chapter six on 'the bread of life' prior to the gospel passage today, Jesus had been speaking of the bread he has given, namely his teaching word. But now he changes to the future tense and speaks of 'the bread that I shall give.' What is this future bread?

'It is my flesh and I will give it for the life of the world.'

As we have noted, the gift of wisdom was spoken of in the Old Testament under the imagery of eating and drinking but never under the images of flesh and blood.

At this point Jesus is moving on the discourse to something beyond the wisdom of his word. He is taking the story up to a higher level of belief.

The Greek word for eating recorded by John is one that expressed audible munching. It was a shocking, revolting expression to a people who had strict laws about drawing off all blood from meat.

The language of Jesus was intended to shock because it anticipates his sacrificial death and the blood he was to shed as the sealing of the new covenant.

The Jews then began to argue about giving his flesh to eat.

Rather than withdraw his statement, Jesus reaffirmed it five times with slight variations. “My flesh is really food and my blood is drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the meal of the new covenant, the fulfilment of the Passover, the celebration of Jesus returning to the Father. That is why there are two tables in the celebration, the table of the Word and the table of the bread and wine.

They correspond to Jesus as the bread of life in his teaching and in his flesh and blood given up for the life of the world.

Jesus is that living bread come down from heaven to be eaten by us that we might live by his life to the glory of the Father.

© Canon Philip Dyson & Holy Family RC Parish www.penzancecatholicchurch.org