

Dear Friends in Christ,

For the next six weeks, the gospel readings will be from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. It is known as the "Bread of Life Discourse." This week we hear about how Jesus fed a large crowd of people with five loaves of barley bread and two fish. The multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle story that is in every one of the four gospels. In John's Gospel, it is something far more than a sign of the divine power of Jesus Christ; it is also a Eucharistic message of how Christ feeds us with his body and blood, soul and divinity.

As chapter six of John's gospel continues, however, we see a profound conflict develop between Jesus and the crowd that was fed. Jesus tells them that unless they eat his body and drink his blood they don't have life in them. Of course, that message is hard for anyone to hear. They see Jesus standing there in the flesh and it is impossible for them to understand how they can eat his body and drink his blood. Jewish people have been many things throughout history, but they have never been cannibals. They cannot understand how the miracle of eating the Body of Jesus could be greater than what God did for their ancestors in the desert when they ate the manna and quail each day during the exodus.

In the end we will see the vast majority of this crowd leave Jesus and his disciples; the message is just too difficult for them to digest. We will hear Jesus ask the remaining disciples this question: "And what about you, are you going to leave me too?" Peter responds, "Lord, where can we go? You have the words of everlasting life."

Take a look at the world around you and you will see there is a profound hunger; a spiritual thirst that only Christ Jesus can satisfy. And yet, the vast majority of Christians, AND CATHOLICS do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We see this reality displayed so powerfully in the emptiness of the church at each Mass. Unfortunately, we have become so accustomed to this reality we no longer care about those who refuse to partake of this meal. Our Church is deeply wounded by this lack of being Eucharistic people.

Most of us who are faithful to the Mass know and understand that Jesus Christ is our life and our salvation and that we do not have life or salvation without his real presence in our lives. However, as we are fed at his table we must continue to be encouraging, inviting, gracious, generous, and welcoming. Whether we like it or not, we who receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist are witnesses of his presence in our lives. We are living signs, billboards advertising the love of Christ in a world of hatred, apathy, and pain.

This week as we partake of this sacred meal let us hear the voice of Christ asking us, "And what about you, are you going to leave me too?" What kind of response are we going to make? Is this too much for us to handle? Or, can we say like Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life."

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel