

Dear Friends

One of the most incredible scripture passages in the Bible is, in my opinion, chapter six of John's Gospel. We have been reading it at daily Mass all this past week. It begins with Jesus feeding a crowd of 5,000 men with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus saw the hunger in the crowd and made sure that everyone had more than enough to eat. After the meal 12 large baskets of leftovers were collected.

The next day, that large crowd that ate the five barley loaves asked Jesus for a sign. God had given their ancestors manna in the desert to eat so that they would not starve to death. Jesus told them that the people who ate the manna always got hungry. Then he offered them bread to eat that would enable them to never be hungry again. He said that he himself was the bread of life that had come down from heaven, and anyone who eats his flesh will never get hungry, and anyone who drinks his blood will never thirst.

This is where the crowd began to think that Jesus wasn't such a great Messiah after all because he was making himself out to be greater than Abraham and Moses and all the prophets. Jesus started talking about his relationship with the Father, the One who sent him to bring salvation to all believers. Then Jesus told them that the only way they would be able to receive that gift of salvation is by eating his body and drinking his blood, which seemed a rather gruesome prospect for the people in that crowd. Finally they all left, all of them, that is, except the twelve. Jesus asked them why they didn't go too, and Peter said these words, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of everlasting life."

So in one short gospel passage Jesus went from evangelizing and feeding a huge crowd of people to standing with a small band of friends. We are left to wonder about the faith of the crowd that gathered to listen to Jesus. What were they looking for? They were looking for a faith that was easy to understand, but it was too hard. And in the end, they weren't really all that hungry. They were satisfied with the barley loaves and fish, but the idea eating the Bread of Life left a sour taste in their mouths and so they walked away.

This weekend 24 children received their First Holy Communion. I visited with these children personally and they said that what they receive in Holy Communion is the Body of Christ. And they are right. They have been able to put into words the great mystery of our faith, and it has been an absolute delight to see their excitement and joy as they have been preparing for this great moment in their lives.

That sour taste of disgust and disbelief our ancestors experienced as they listened to Jesus is not part of the lives those second graders who have just received their First Holy Communion. Without being able to explain their belief (and who of us can?) they are convinced that the little piece of consecrated bread is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of

God, who suffered, died and was raised from the dead for the salvation of the world. This is what we taught the children of our parish, this is what they believe. My hope and prayer is that they always will.

John the Evangelist had an important message when he wrote his gospel, it is expressed in chapter 6, verse 40, **“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.”** When I read this statement I am comforted by God’s will. It gives me such joy to know that what God desires for all of us is that we have eternal life with him.

The great challenge for us is in seeing and believing in Jesus Christ. It is easy for eight year olds to state their belief because they take in what we say with such trust and enthusiasm. But something happens as we get older. We gain knowledge as we get older. And this knowledge shapes the way we think about life. It can even change our beliefs.

So many people today do not feel it is important to receive the Body of Christ. What does that say about their belief in his presence? Does it say that we don’t need him? Does it say we’re too busy for him? Does it possibly even say that we don’t believe in him?

I cannot answer these questions because I don’t want to assume what may not be true. All I can say is that it is up to our entire parish to foster our faith by seeing, believing and knowing that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. More than anything else, our dependence upon the gift of eternal life becomes a powerful witness and example to the children of this community to follow in their young lives.

What a joyful moment this is as we welcome these twenty four beautiful children to the table of the Lord.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel.