

Dear Friends,

This weekend we begin a five week series of readings from chapter 6 of John's Gospel. Why do we do this? Well, the biggest reason is that when we are in Year B the Gospel of St. Mark is the focus for the Liturgy of the Word. Mark is the shortest gospel and there is not enough material to cover all thirty four weeks of Ordinary Time.

There is another important reason for us to listen carefully to chapter 6 of John's Gospel. This particular chapter is known as the "Bread of Life Discourse." In this chapter Jesus feeds the crowd with a few loaves of bread and some fish. The next day he talks about how he is the Bread of Life come down from heaven. He tells the crowd that the bread they ate the day before was nothing, that they would be hungry again after eating that bread. And so he tells them they have to eat his body and drink his blood so that they will never hunger or thirst in God's kingdom. This notion was repulsive to the crowd and by the end of chapter 6 of John's gospel most of them walked away because they could not accept what Jesus said to them.

During these weeks in which we read The Bread of Life Discourse, we are being forced to consider what we believe about the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. Is his presence in the Eucharist just a sign? Or, is his presence a reality we embrace? We believe the Eucharist is the "source and summit of all Christian life" and that when we partake of this meal his presence transforms our lives. Are we open to the transformation that awaits us as we eat his body and drink his blood? Or, are we comfortable with the status quo?

The answer to this question can only be found by understanding our hunger. Are we hungry for a sign? Are we hungry for what we've always had? Are we hungry for comfort food that magically blesses our lives? Or, are we hungry for Bread that feeds and nourishes our souls in such a way that we become the living presence of Jesus Christ – who is the Bread of Life for a starving world?

"Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Do you also want to leave?'" Jesus asked this question of the twelve as he saw the vast crowd walk away person by person,

each one shaking his or her head in disbelief. They were confused, they were angry. Their hearts were filled with pain because they thought they had found their Messiah, but his words could not be accepted. Jesus was not the Messiah they were hoping for so they walked away. Over these next weeks it is important for us to listen to this question Jesus asks. Do we want to leave? So many people have left. Many have been given ample reason to leave the Church. Many others just walk away without much reason at all.

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.’” Why do we stay? Are we convinced that Jesus is the Holy One of God? Are we convinced that he has the words of eternal life? If we are convinced then we are truly open to the powerful transformation of the Eucharist in our lives. When we choose to stay we understand that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist breaks open our hearts so that we can love as he loves us, feed others as we have been fed, and die to ourselves so that the world might know the glory of life Christ offers us.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel