

Homily for August 20, 2000  
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Proverbs 9:1-6  
Ephesians 5:15-20  
John 6: 51-58

## *There is more here than meets the eye*

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day,” says Jesus in John chapter 6.

Life – now, not tomorrow – eternal life begins now, not at some future date with death. Though we tend to identify “eternal life” as the reward following death, in St. John’s Gospel that eternal life begins in this life. And that life is sustained, nourished, fed by eating Jesus’ glorified flesh and blood. Now this was totally shocking to his Jewish hearers, as it would be today if taken literally – and it was meant to shock – to separate believers from nonbelievers. Genesis chapter 9 expressly forbade the drinking of blood – tantamount to cannibalism. Saint John uses what some biblical scholars refer to as an *antilanguage*; that is, a language of a group which sees itself as a clear alternative to another group. By this time in the early church, St. John’s community was clearly outside of mainstream Judaism. For these early Christians, Jesus’ words are life-giving. They mean eternal life begins now, not later. But for those outside this group, they are offensive. While the nonbelievers in the scene hear only cannibalism, the Christian reader is challenged to affirm the seemingly impossible: that in receiving the

Eucharist, our full humanity is joined with the full but transformed humanity of Jesus, and this constitutes life in its fullness right now that will never be taken away.

Is it any wonder that those early Christians were so astounded, so amazed that they became what they received at the table of the Lord that they just had to tell people about it – especially the poor and the sick? They couldn’t keep it to themselves. There simply is more here than meets the eye. What our Eucharist introduces is what Walt Whitman called “the terrible doubt of appearances,” things just aren’t as they seem anymore. Jesus says in effect, “Within the new world my rising creates – you won’t be able to tell the difference between ordinary bread and this bread of eternal life. You won’t be able to tell the difference between me – in the brightness of my risen glory – and that arthritic old woman skulking down the street, pushing her beat up supermarket cart with its garish collection of plastic shopping bags and soiled fabrics.” What this terrible doubt of appearances calls us to is that we now are to look for the Risen One in neighbors, in the world at large and in the faces of strangers. Because things are no longer as they seem, the sacrament of the glorified flesh and blood of Jesus calls us to involvement in work, to labor, the use of our hands, muscles and physical strength. ...That God is

all wrapped up in the human – so much so that if we aren't surprised when God shows up, we just haven't been looking in the right places and we just haven't learned how to see in the dark. The real presence of Jesus in bread and wine and in you and in me reminds us that God is in every dimension of human life...in sports and in play, in dance and in sorrow. The symbol that comes to mind here is passion, crucifixion, the cross. Jesus' language of flesh and blood reminds us of Calvary and of sacrifice. For us that means that we are part of the pain of neighbor and the pain of life, not just our own. Dying we are asked to trust, hurting we are asked to help and to heal where possible, and all through the battlement of pain, we are asked to still believe in love's witness and that we possess eternal life now.

Confined to a wheelchair for many years, Andre Dubus described this eloquently in his *Meditations From a Movable Chair*: "When the priest places the Host in the palm of my hand, I put in my mouth and taste and chew and swallow the intimacy of God."

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