

**Remedy for Death**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Jn 6:41-51)**

It is not possible to speak about the Eucharist without understanding exactly who Jesus is. Faith in the Eucharist depends on faith in Christ as the divine Son of God. Before Jesus speaks of giving his body and blood as food and drink, he speaks of himself as the living bread “come down from heaven” (Jn 6:41), and of his origin from the Father before time.

The people wonder at the audacious claim of Jesus that he is “from heaven.” Is he not “from Nazareth,” the son of Joseph and Mary? (Jn 6:42). Jesus explains that faith in him requires a special gift of the Father. In fulfillment of the scriptures – “*they shall be taught by God*” (Jn 6:45, Is 54:13) – each man will be directly enlightened by the Holy Spirit in order to see Jesus in his divinity, and see the image of God the Father in him.

It is this faith which we profess in the Creed: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages; God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God...” Only with this faith can we proceed to listen to Jesus’ words about the Eucharist.

Since the people in the crowd had difficulty recognizing Jesus’ eternal origins with the Father as the second person of the Holy Trinity, they were doubly scandalized when he finally introduced the Eucharist, which is the great goal and culmination of the Incarnation: “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world*” (Jn 6:51).

Not only does Jesus claim to be the “living bread come down from heaven,” he also claims that this bread to be eaten is his flesh. Initially, he seems to be speaking metaphorically of himself as “bread,” which provides the nourishment of salvation to mankind through faith. That is, by recognizing Jesus as Son of God, believing and accepting him as savior, we are saved. And this is indeed true, up to verse 51 of the discourse.

But in verse 51 he begins to speak of giving his flesh in a much more literal way, evident from the immediate reaction and complaint of his listeners.<sup>1</sup> The Jews quarreled saying, “*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*” (Jn 6:52). In response to which Jesus solemnly and repeatedly reiterates and declares the literalness of what he is saying:

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<sup>1</sup> The famous passage from the Bread of Life discourse, John 6:52-59, is assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B), which, however, will be skipped this year due to the intervening Solemnity of the Assumption next week.

*“Amen, Amen, I say to you: unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53). “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...” (Jn 6:54). “My flesh is real<sup>2</sup> food, and my blood is real drink” (Jn 6:55). This amazing passage of the Gospel of John (6:51-58) is actually a seven-fold proclamation of the doctrine of the Eucharist, centered upon the middle, fourth statement of verse 55, and characterized by the use of the technical and graphic Greek word for eating, “phageo,” instead of the more general word “esthio.”*

It remains shocking and scandalous today. Many Christians simply do not accept the literal words of Jesus, and live their Christian faith without the Eucharist. Even among Catholics, understand and belief in the Real Presence is not universal, and the casual and irreverent way we often approach the Eucharist is evidence of a lack of true faith.

But the lack of faith in the Eucharist goes back to lack of faith in the Divinity of Christ, and a failure to fully appreciate what it means that God became Man.

The Eucharist is the real goal of the Incarnation. God became man and accomplished the salvation of mankind by his death and resurrection so that human nature would have a full remedy not only for sin, but for death. God not only wipes away sin by satisfying justice, paying its price; he provides the healing for sin’s consequence which is death. This is the Eucharist.

Throughout the Bread of Life discourse, whenever Jesus speaks of the Eucharist he speaks of it in terms of life and resurrection: *“whoever eats this bread will live forever” (Jn 6:51), “I will raise him on the last day” (6:44,54).*

The goal of the Eucharist is Resurrection. Jesus gives his Body and Blood as food, so that they might become part of our body and blood, and give to our mortality his own immortal grace.

The Resurrection is not symbolic, and it does not take place on a mental, psychological, spiritual, or symbolic level. It takes place in the body, in the flesh. Therefore, the Eucharistic Body and Blood are not symbolic, metaphorical, or merely spiritual. They are bodily: *“my flesh is real food, my blood is real drink.”* The Eucharist is a real “inoculation” against death, so that even when mortality runs its course it cannot be the final outcome. Whatever bones and flesh and ashes have been assimilated to the Eucharistic Body and Blood of the Lord, will rise again.

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<sup>2</sup> Real / True / Actual

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the bread and wine are truly changed into the substance of Christ's Body and Blood, and are given for our consumption. But the flesh we eat is not the condition seen on Good Friday, but on Easter Sunday. It is the risen Lord we receive in Holy Communion, it is with Resurrected flesh and blood that our body and soul are united.

The Eucharist is the goal of the Incarnation, and the heart of the Church. It is the most important of the seven sacraments, to which all the others are related. And though it is not possible to see or understand how bread and wine can be changed into Christ's Body and Blood, there is no doubt whatsoever about this reality, having recognized who Jesus is, and what he spoke in the synagogue of Capernaum (Jn 6:59) on the day following the multiplication of loaves and fishes.