

Here we are on the fourth Sunday where Jesus again declares he is the bread of life. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is teaching his disciples—the twelve we know and many others in a synagogue. He is teaching about Israel's experience in the wilderness and his followers again ask for a sign for them similar to the one experienced so long ago by the Israelites. This astounds me.

Why do they keep asking for signs? Was feeding the five thousand not enough? What about all the miraculous healing that Jesus did? What, exactly, do these people want in order to believe in Jesus? Luckily, it was Jesus teaching and not me because he responds not with anger or disgust but with certainty and calmness. He replies that while the Israelites were given manna from heaven to eat to sustain them in their journey, now Jesus has come to be the bread of life for all, the new manna from heaven that provides light, love, and life eternal for those who believe in him.

But, it isn't just belief, is it? No. Jesus says "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me." Jesus wants so much

more from his disciples than mere belief. He wants them and us to feast on him—to eat his flesh and drink his blood so that he is in us and we are in him. Now, this is before the Last Supper teaching by Jesus but I think that is what he is referring to.

However, it was a new thought for his disciples which I imagine was a very disturbing vision for them.

In fact, it is still disturbing if you take it literally. The act of cannibalism is illegal and for good reason. We do not want to encourage people to eat other people. But, we are not to take this passage literally. Jesus was not encouraging his disciples to consume his physical presence. To us, the idea of partaking of Jesus' body and blood is something we do weekly so it does not sound as bizarre as it must have sounded to the listeners of that time. But, Jesus wants his listeners then and now to know that they are to be fully immersed in him, in his teachings, following his ways in order to stay in communion with God. As Jesus tells us a few chapters later in John he is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus wants his disciples to understand that and to fully abide in him.

Jesus is the way of life just like manna was the life-giving bread that the Israelites needed after they left Egypt. In fact, the manna

story has many similarities with how Jesus was being treated by his followers. In Exodus, the Israelites were sustained and nourished by the bread given by God. Likewise, Jesus' followers are being nourished through Jesus' teaching and example. He is the bread of life for them. He is the new manna, God's gift to sustain them. However, Jesus was being treated the same way the Israelites treated God during the Exodus—they become unhappy with what God had given them and begin to complain and grumble about it. We have read about the grumbling and ungratefulness of the Israelites in the wilderness.

“They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?”

The Israelites were angry at Moses and God and at that moment would have probably returned to Egypt if they could. They did not understand God's vision for them. Likewise, some of the disciples in today's reading did not understand Jesus' teaching and chose to leave Jesus at this point. He was treated as poorly as the Israelites treated God so many years ago in the wilderness. But, all is not lost. Jesus asks the 12 disciples if they are going to leave him as well and Peter responds ““Lord, to whom can we

go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Let's examine Peter's words and how they apply in our own lives. First, Peter asks to whom can we go? Who is there other than Jesus who leads us to God? He is the way. How often do we remember that Jesus is the way—not just the way to God, but the way we are to live, the way we are to treat others, the way we are to be? I work to remember that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life but I must admit when I am in traffic and someone cuts me off or does some other maneuver that is stupid, I am not thinking about how Jesus would address the situation or that I need to back off and be a loving and compassionate person to all the other harried drivers out there. However, I do think that is what Jesus wants us to do. He wants us to emulate him and offer love to all whom we encounter---even those who don't drive all that well. So, I think if I want to follow him and act like him then I need to incorporate this desire and my belief throughout my life and not compartmentalize. Jesus needs to be running through my veins all the time—probably especially when I am driving. I need him to abide in me. I am sure you may have other things where you forego following Jesus and I encourage you to take the time to

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abide in Jesus and bring him into those times so that you are following Jesus at all times.

Next Peter says "You have the words of eternal life."

This reminds me of the conversation that a Catholic priest ([Kevin Codd,](#)) traveling the camino de santiago in Spain related that he had with other travelers in his book Beyond Even the Stars. It went like this:

He recounts a conversation along the route with some unchurched people who were very curious about what he was doing, and about his faith. After he shares a little of his faith in Jesus, they said to him:

*So do you believe Jesus is a greater master than Buddha or Muhammad or other spiritual teachers?*

*I do. I am a Christian, which means that I believe that though there are other revealers and prophets, he is the most full revealer of God.*

*So you believe Christianity is better than other religions?*

*Yes. But "better" in the sense of a fuller picture of God, not in a moral sense.*

*Do you really believe that Jesus is divine?*

Yes.

*So do you believe only Christians can be saved?*

*No, I believe that lots of people of many traditions can know much of God, and are good and holy people, probably holier than I am, and will certainly be welcomed by God into his eternal embrace; but, yes, I believe that those who know Jesus have the best picture of who God is.*

*But surely you understand that the belief that Jesus is divine is just a myth, a sort of fable, don't you?*

*No, I see Jesus as real, as real as you or me, more real than you or me. Without him I cannot be me, my real me, my truest me.*

Like the Catholic priest and Peter, we have also come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. It is this knowledge that we are bound to live into and bring to others who may not know of God's wonderful grace and sacrifice of love for us. Again, I'm not asking you to knock on doors or beat people over the head with a plan of salvation but I am asking you to pray for opportunities where you can share your faith, where you can let people know what it is like to abide in Jesus and have him abide in you. We have the most wonderful savior who gave up his life for us and who taught us to love God, love ourselves and to love

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others. Why would we not want to share about it? So, when Laura sends you out at the end of the service remember that part of your job is to share Jesus with those whom you encounter this week. Amen.