

“The Bread of Life”

Homily by: Deacon Jerry Brennan

Our Lady of the Wayside – July 24, 2021



A friend of mine ministered in an Ecumenical Bible study ten years ago. They were studying John’s Gospel. The majority of the participants and the leaders were non-Catholic I asked him what they did when they got to John 6. John 6 begins with today’s Gospel and is referred to as the Bread of Life discourse.

Bill smiled and said they skipped it. They skipped the Bread of Life discourse!

I guess that is a question for each of us. Do we skip the Bread of Life discourse, do we skim it or do we really study it and accept in faith what Christ is teaching? John has a different placement of his discussion of the Eucharist than Matthew, Mark and Luke. They all have Jesus performing the liturgy of the Eucharist as part of the Last Supper discourse and the words Jesus speaks are essentially the same words father will say in a few minutes at the Institution of the Eucharist.

In each of the three Synoptic Gospels this a few sentences a few verses. They each have some other discussions at the Last Supper, Luke the washing of the disciples feet for instance but in these three Gospels the Eucharist is a formula, a how to. In John’s Gospel, The Last Supper discourse is five chapters long, approximately 20% of his Gospel and he does not even mention the formula. Jesus is teaching and providing many important lessons in anticipation of his pending arrest and death in John’s Last Supper discourse but not the Eucharist.

John on the other hand addresses the Eucharist much earlier, in Chapter 6. This is approximately in the middle of Christ’s public ministry.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit inspired the other three to get the formula right “This is my body” and one long and clear explanation in John of why we need to partake.

In today's Gospel Jesus multiplies the loaves. This is a Eucharistic miracle. It is spring; the grass was long and green. The Passover is approaching. It anticipates the Last Supper.

Is Jesus a nice guy? It is easy to humanize this miracle. Jesus convinces those in the crowd who have bread to share. He does want us to share with the needy. A nice guy might convince us to soften our heart and share but that is not what this miracle about. It is not about sharing.

Multiplication of loaves is not about sharing. If there were two loaves per bag and 1000 bags. Then mathematical multiplication would tell you that you have 2000 loaves, perhaps enough for this crowd. I remember when my dad first taught me about fractions when I was in preschool. $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ are one. I thought if I had $\frac{1}{2}$ of nothing in this hand and $\frac{1}{2}$ of nothing in the other hand I could put it together and have a whole German Shepherd puppy. It does not work now and did not work then. But when Jesus multiplies 5 loaves here and nothing there and gets enough to feed 5,000 he is doing what I wanted to accomplish but could not as a 4 year old.

Jesus is not a nice guy. He is the Son of God. Repeat after me Jesus is not a nice guy. He is the Son of God. If he were just a nice guy, we would say I can accept this teaching but not that. But if he is the Son of God. How did he accomplish this miracle what did he use to make enough loaves to feed the 5,000?

I have a little secret for you. We cannot prove a miracle by showing how it was accomplished. We can prove a miracle by showing what existed before and what exists afterwards. It is a miracle because there is no explanation for how. We can only accept it in faith.

This is part of the problem we have with the Eucharist. We think we are well-educated people; people of reason. You could read the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas's greatest theological treatise that explain the Eucharist. But if you do not have faith what does it matter. You could Google "Eucharistic Miracle" and read about the many Eucharistic miracles that have occurred over the last 800 or so years and discover that the muscle tissue that is present is always from the traumatized heart

muscle of a man. The blood is always of the blood type is always the same, the type we refer to as universal donor. I am sure miracles that have occurred over 100s of years and on a variety of continents were all coordinated to meet scientific standards that had not yet been developed. But reason and science can provide evidence but ultimately you have to have faith.

Jesus is not a nice guy. He is the Son of God. This miracle and Jesus' teaching over the rest of the Bread of Life discourse leads to growing division. Jesus is the way to the Father. He is the Way to everlasting life. We must eat of his flesh and drink of his blood. In today's Gospel, they pursue Jesus. They want to make him king. Who can blame them? Everyone wants free stuff. But he retreats, that is not the relationship he wants. His message gets harder and harder.

Over the next few weeks as we unpack the Bread of Life discourse I encourage you to read the whole discourse in one sitting. Read John 6, perhaps even as a family if that is appropriate. It gives you a more complete sense of what he wants and what he offers.

Jesus is not a nice guy. He is the Son of God. We are missing part of John 6 this year. It is the hard part when Christ emphasizes you must really partake of my body and blood and people begin to leave. This Gospel is preempted by the readings for the Solemnity of the Assumption, which is on a Sunday this year. The Gospel we are missing tells us that as people are leaving because Jesus's sayings were hard he reemphasizes what he means. He could have said hey I was exaggerating for effect. Instead, he uses even stronger language. In the original *koinoi* Greek the word we translate as eat in this section of the discourse is *togo*, which means to gnaw or chew like an animal. Jesus is not a nice guy. He is the Son of God. He is offering us salvation. He is offering us his body and blood as a means of Salvation and to unite with him in his ministry.

Let us gnaw on the meaning of the Bread of Life discourse. This is really the Body and Blood of Christ. When we are offered the Body of Christ at Communion, when we respond Amen we are saying, in faith, I believe.

