

20th Sunday OT Year B

Whoever eats this bread will live forever.

August 15-16, 2015

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

Though not a holy day of obligation this year, we still honored the Blessed Mother on the Solemnity of the Assumption yesterday. This Feast celebrates the truth of the faith that we are not complete without our bodies. Our bodies are not some useless appendage. No, Mary experiences in heaven now what we hope one day to experience— fullness of life, body and soul, with God in heaven. Jesus Christ is the living flesh, broken for us, given for us to receive.

The Eucharist and the Blessed Mother thus are intimately linked. One way we honor Mary is through a profound respect for her holiness. We honor the Lord best by honoring his commandments. Jesus stressed the necessity of an unquestioning faith in Him who had come down from heaven, as one who had seen the Father. The Bread from Heaven, the gift of the Eucharist, is a gift so profound that we desire to receive it in purity of heart, imitating the faith and trust of Mary.

Today's Gospel highlights the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It is no mere appendage to the theology of the sacrament. Our teaching flows directly from Scripture and Tradition, including the Gospel passage for today. "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." It is not merely a symbol; rather, it is a deep mystery that enables us to see how the reception of Christ's Body and Blood makes us become more like him.

There is no better way to become more like Jesus than the act of receiving him into our bodies and souls. This very Scripture passage alone has brought many people into the Church, while others, as in the time of Jesus, rejected it outright and walked away. It is impossible to remain neutral— that much is for certain.

Our approach to the Eucharist has to be one of faith and trust and an abiding reverence for what we are experiencing. While watching the program for our Children's Choir Camp, our director made a great point. She had been congratulated once for the fact that one of her choirs was invited to sing at a major league baseball game. Indeed, it is an honor to sing the Anthem at a venue such as Target Field. But, as she noted, choirs are so much more privileged to sing at the banquet of the Eucharist- at least they ought to be!

Thus, we rightfully guard against receiving unworthily, carefully examining our conscience, lest we have committed grave sin. Sacramental confession restores sanctifying grace in our souls, so that we may be pleasing to God upon approaching the altar. We deny ourselves food and drink prior to Communion, for in fasting even for that brief period of an hour, we become more aware that the food we receive sacramentally is of an entirely different kind, nourishing our soul.

We do our best to get to Church on time, as a sign of respect for the full integrity of the Mass, made up of both the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. I thank you for your efforts, especially on warm weekends such as this, or snowy ones in the winter. Your commitment does not go unnoticed.

Saint Paul warns us not to "continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord." This too was the sole desire of the Blessed Mother. As a pure vessel, she was free from original sin. We look to Mary, who remains ever a model for Christians. From her place in heaven she prays for us. Her life with God should also serve as a goal for us for which to strive. Mary, Queen of heaven, pray for us.