

Corpus Christi Year "A"
June 21-22, 2014

Whoever eats this bread will live forever.

Readings: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

While I would not presume to speak for others in this regard, I have never been attracted to living forever, at least not in an earthly sense. In the United States, only 50 percent of children born in 1900 could reasonably hope to reach the age of 50; life expectancy today is nearly 80 years of age and rising. These changes are the result of a combination of factors including nutrition and public health, and medicine, especially the reduction of infant mortality. Turtles easily live to 100 years, while a bowhead whale's life can approach 200 years.

When Jesus teaches us that if we eat the Bread of Life we will live forever, I suspect that his words aroused tremendous speculation. What does it mean to live forever? Can we even comprehend the concept of *forever*? In my pocket dictionary, the word *infinity* is followed by the word *infirm* meaning one who is physically weak or feeble. This is fitting, for when we try to contemplate eternity, infinity, or forever, we have no reference point.

The Greeks invented a special word for the fear of the infinite.¹ Philosophers have described infinity as "a fathomless gulf, into which all things vanish." Poets have called it "a dark illimitable ocean, without bound."² And today, modern computers have calculated the value of *pi* to over a trillion places, with no final value for *pi* in sight.

Perhaps we ought to accept our limitations and take Jesus at his word. We will live forever in God's presence when we receive the Bread of Life, the Bread of Angels, and the True Flesh of our Redeemer. St. Thomas wrote so beautifully of this mystery in the Eucharistic hymn sung at

¹ The Greek word *apeirophobia*

² Philosopher Marcus Aurelius and the English poet John Milton

Benediction: “Faith supplies what the senses cannot perceive.”³

Jesus Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist to give those who believe in Him the power they need to remain alive in His grace. Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that the Body of Christ is present in the Blessed Eucharist just as it is in Himself, as is also the Soul of Christ, together with His intellect and will.

But he explained, "*Christ's Body is in this sacrament 'by way of substance,' not by way of quantity.*"⁴ In other words, “it is evident that the dimensions of the bread or wine are not changed into the dimensions of the body of Christ, but substance into substance.”⁵ He is there with his glorious Body in a real, though mysterious and ineffable way. He enters into our souls, that they may be transformed more and more into his likeness. One day we hope to be with Him for eternity, for an everlasting present.

If we try to understand the Eucharist intellectually, we may gain much that is worthwhile, but we will always come up short, just as we do when contemplating infinity. God is beyond our categories, and while our words teach Truth, they cannot fully encompass the Truth of His love. Today, we bow before the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, we offer our prayers of thanksgiving, and we bask in His presence, echoing these sentiments of Saint Augustine:

“Until we arrive at eternity, let us trust in the Lord God; because when we have reached eternity, there will be no longer, *hope*, but the thing itself will be ours.”⁶

³ Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, (III,76, 1, ad 3)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ St. Augustine, *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 131.