

August 18, 2024 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Jesus the Bread of Life” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 6:51-58

For the last three Sundays, the main topic of the Gospel has been about bread.

In all these Sundays, we have heard from the Gospel of John chapter 6 where the Lord Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life, the bread that came down from heaven. Bread from heaven was a familiar image for the people the Lord Jesus taught and talked to.

They all knew the story of their ancestors in the wilderness, of how the Lord provided manna to feed them, to sustain them in the desert.

That gift of manna (Bread from Heaven) was given to them daily, and they had to gather it daily. They could not save or store any manna for the following day because it would go bad; it would become rotten and inedible. They had to trust the Lord that this Bread from Heaven was going to be there every day and there was no need to hoard or store it for the next day. Let's not forget that this manna was only for the Hebrew people who by God's hand had been liberated from years of slavery in Egypt. This Bread from Heaven was not for all nations yet. The Lord Jesus had to come into the world to make the Bread from Heaven available to all people.

The images of Jesus as the Bread from Heaven are mostly found in the passages from the Gospel of John, Chapter 6. But it is not an isolated theme from the Gospel of John. The image of Jesus as the Bread from Heaven had been in God's mind for a long, long time.

We know that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was not just the result of Emperor Augustus' decree that sent all male Israelites to go to register in their hometowns for tax purposes. It was part of the prophesy from the Prophet Micah that the Messiah was going to be born in Bethlehem, the City of King David.

What is interesting is that the meaning of “Bethlehem” is the “House of Bread”. Is this the reason why the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Was the town of Bethlehem a sign that the Lord Jesus is the bread of life, the Bread from Heaven?

What we learn is that the Bread from Heaven came into this world in the “House of Bread”, not just for a few people, or for a special nation. No, he came to be the bread of life for the entire world. And this is the big difference between manna bread and the Lord Jesus. Manna was just for a few people living in the wilderness. It was given to them to keep them alive during their time in the desert. The Lord Jesus, the Living Bread from Heaven, gives eternal life and sustains us here in this world and in the next.

This is why the Lord Jesus said, *“⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”*

Of course, we all know that when the Lord Jesus said this, He was not talking about His physical body and blood, He was talking about His spiritual body and blood that we receive at Holy Communion.

Since the beginning of the early church, Christians have understood that the celebration of Holy Communion is the visible sign of our union with Christ. The bread and the wine become the spiritual body and blood of Christ that make us one with Him.

Unfortunately for the early Christians, this was misunderstood and became one of the reasons for their persecution. They were falsely accused of many things, among them was the crime of cannibalism.

Rumours spread throughout the Roman Empire that Christians in their secret gatherings and rituals practiced cannibalism. People had no knowledge of the real meaning of Holy Communion, but Christians did and they risked their lives for the Bread from Heaven, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are in different times now, at least in this part of the world, because there are still Christians in other countries that risk their lives for the Bread that is available to us almost every Sunday morning.

But the meaning of Holy Communion does go beyond Sunday or the moment when we extend our hands to receive the bread and drink the wine.

Holy Communion is an act of remembrance: we remember the New Covenant of Jesus’ flesh and blood, we remember that we are part of the universal Christian family, the Body of Christ in the world because Holy Communion has to be celebrated in community. We hold on to the promise

and belief that remaining in communion with Jesus and with one another, the Lord Jesus will raise us up on the last day.

This Holy Sacrament alone is a good reason to trust one another, to believe in each other, not to look down on others but to lift each other up, to speak well of our Christian brothers and sisters and to encourage and love one another.

There is a famous quote from the movie “Gladiator” that says, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”

The Book of Revelation talks about the Book of Life that contains all our actions in this life. Our individual judgement will be based on the information found in that book. Yes, what we do in life echoes in eternity, it transcends time, space and form.

When the Lord Jesus celebrated His Last Supper with His disciples, He asked them to continue doing it in remembrance of Him. It was His wish that the remembrance and sharing of his body and blood would transcend time and space.

Holy Communion is an act, a ritual done on earth that echoes into eternity, but that also reminds us that in the same way we remember Him at His Table, we should also remember how to live in communion with our neighbors, and especially with our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus.

The body and blood of Jesus Christ unite us here on earth as well as in heaven. When we come to the Lord’s Table, let’s be mindful of what we are receiving, what it means, and how it touches our minds, hearts and souls, so that our communion with the Lord Jesus becomes, as well, a communion with our fellow Christian brothers and sisters.

With help from God, let’s make this Holy Ritual here on earth an event that echoes in heaven every time we celebrate it. *Amen.*