

20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. John 6:51-58

The most innate desire of every human heart is communion with God. This is the meaning of life. It is not something hidden deep within philosophical thought or mystical religions. It is clear and apparent and it is granted to us, in part, in this life, so that we may long for it even more in the life to come.

It is the Mass, above all else, in which that communion with God is found. There are other ways but they are imperfect and they offer so much less. Often we determine the value of something by our feelings or emotions. If we feel good about it then it must be good, if we feel bad about it or even apathetic then it must be irrelevant. We may forsake our prayers, the Sacraments, even the Mass because we are distracted or bored and so we argue that these things are rendered meaningless. But the Mass is objective, it does not rely on our feelings or our ideas but on truth and the truth that in this holy sacrifice the bread and wine become truly the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Christ. The Mass is the perfect act of worship, the perfect prayer—objectively perfect, because the Mass is Our Lord's own prayer, His own sacrifice on the Cross, His own act of worship, made present for us.

It is for this reason that the the dignity of the Mass must be protected and safeguarded. It is why the integrity of the prayers, of the gestures, of the music matter so much and why nothing can be added to the Mass to suit our mood and why nothing can be taken away for the sake of expediency. It is because the Mass is not the work of the Priest but the

work of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit so that in despite of the imperfect service of the Priest and the people we are swept up in the perfect service of Christ Himself.

In these seven verses of this Gospel the Lord repeats seven times, “My flesh is real food, my Blood is real drink.” There can be no mistaking His intent or His meaning. To heighten this incredible statement the verb “to eat” or “feeding” in the original Greek of St. John is the most crude, the most basic, form of the word so that no argument can be made that it is symbolic. For as it is written in the first reading from the book of Proverbs this is the house built by Wisdom so that we who eat and drink the Body and Blood may leave our folly and walk in the ways of perception (see *Prov.* 9:6).

In the past it was required that communicants fast from midnight before receiving Holy Communion. In World War II soldiers, exhausted by fatigue and hunger would nevertheless fast from midnight and often until the next evening simply so they could receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord. In their sacrifice for King and country they recognised ever more clearly the sacrifice of Christ. In this great sacrifice of Our Lord we prepare ourselves by our own sacrifices. We sacrifice our pride and disordered desires by seeking the forgiveness of God and His grace in the confessional, we sacrifice our time so as to be drawn into a world beyond time, and we sacrifice our hunger by fasting for one hour before we receive Holy Communion.

The Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, stated, “the Eucharistic sacrifice... is the source and summit of the whole Christian life” (n. 11) and that we, the Priest with the faithful, in offering the Divine Victim to almighty God, offer ourselves

along with Him. The Mass is a moment in time which reaches back to the dawn of creation and stretches forth to the fulfillment of humanity and continues into eternity. It is the moment that heaven and earth meet, when we behold God, and that sacrifice on calvary two-thousand years ago is made present and real on this very altar.