

20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – B; August 18th 2024
Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

This is the 3rd consecutive weekend we listen to the Discourse of Jesus on the **Bread of Life**. Today's passage is supposed to be the heart of the Discourse and the most intense one. Last week we heard how much scandal and confusion Jesus created among his audience, especially by claiming, **'The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.'** This statement was a little too much for the Jews to absorb. As we heard in today's gospel, they asked, **"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"** The irony and impossibility remained in the fact that Jesus was asking them to ***eat his own flesh while he was still alive***. It is amazing to notice that Jesus just repeated what he had said but added another abomination by asking the Jews *to drink his blood as well*.

We should notice that the Jewish people were strictly prohibited from drinking even any animal blood, let alone human blood. In this passage we find the usage, **'flesh' 6 times and 'blood' 4 times**. We also don't see Jesus giving them any sort of clarification or interpretation for his saying. It seems that Jesus remains very stern in what he said. At the same time the disciples didn't have the courage to ask Jesus as what he meant by the saying. Remember, in the case of the parable of the **'Sower'** we find his disciples asking Jesus privately in the house, to explain the parable and Jesus did so. According to John in this case even Peter never had the nerve to request Jesus for an explanation at all.

The people who gathered around Jesus that day went away confused; but his disciples anyhow remained with him. Almost a year later something unusual happened at the *Last Passover Meal* which Jesus celebrated with his twelve apostles. The synoptic gospels (Mt, Mk and Lk) give us the account of the great event of the Institution of the Eucharist. St. Paul in 1Cor. 11: 23-26 also gives us the same account of the Institution of the Eucharist, though he himself was not present at the Last Supper. St. Paul's account is important for the very fact that even before the first gospel, the gospel of Mark, came out, Paul put it in black and white. We are very familiar with the Institutional Words of Jesus in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20. The same words we use at the time of Consecration at every Mass. Only Luke says that, at the end of the Eucharistic Meal Jesus commanded his apostles, **'Do it in memory of me.'** In John Jesus uses the term **'My flesh' repeatedly**; but at the time of the Institution of the Eucharist instead of the word **'flesh'** he uses the term **'My Body'** and the usage of **'My Blood'** is the same. We don't know for sure why Jesus is so brief in his words when he instituted such a great mystery? The only reason, perhaps, is that Jesus had given a very lengthy discourse in

John on the 'Flesh and Blood.' Naturally, when the apostles heard him saying at the Last Supper, '*This is my Body and this is my Blood*' they were not shocked rather; right away their memory went back to the Eucharistic Discourse. And this is the time they have understood clearly the meaning of the full Discourse of Jesus.

The commandment of Jesus '**Do it in memory of me**' was taken up by the apostles very seriously and very literally. If we go back to the early history of the Church, according to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we come to know that the early Church, under the guidance of the apostles celebrated the Eucharist every Sunday when they gathered together. In fact, this was the only celebration they had. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, "**They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers**" (Acts 2:42). The early Christians never used the word, '**Eucharist**' and '**Eucharistic celebration**' or the term the Mass rather; the **breaking of the bread was the Eucharistic celebration they had.**

The most important point in this passage is the emphatic saying of Jesus: "**Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.**" In the entire Eucharistic Discourse of Jesus these words are the most important ones for our eternal life. **It is very clear that in order to attain eternal life and to remain in Jesus, one should partake in the Body/Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ.** The Catholic Church has understood the teaching of Jesus in its entirety and she strictly follows his commandment, '**Do this in memory of me.**' Only Catholics have the opportunity to receive the Body and Blood of Christ even daily as we have the Eucharistic celebration daily. The Eucharist is the greatest gift Jesus has given us and through the Eucharist Jesus fulfilled the promise he made to his apostles, "**Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.**"