

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, May 10th 2014

Today's Gospel reading begins with the words, "Then many of his disciples who were listening said, 'This saying is hard; who can accept it?'" So obviously we need to check the text to recall what Jesus had just said. We discover that this reaction comes right after Jesus had said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" (John 6:56-57).

And this exchange is part of a longer section including Jesus' statement, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." Then John writes, "The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" Like the Samaritan woman at the well, they take him literally, thinking that he is referring to some kind of cannibalism. But then Jesus continues to use that challenging language, including the words I quoted in the first paragraph. And that leaves "many of his disciples" just as confused as the group called "the Jews." Finally, Jesus offers some help in understanding that language that at first sounds like cannibalism: "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son Man ascending to where he was before. It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail." The mention of the ascension evokes the reality of the transformed, risen Christ. So the participation in the physical meal of the Eucharist, is also the appropriation of the transformed reality of the risen Christ, in which we become what we consume, part of his risen body, the believing community.

Lord Jesus, as we walk toward the altar to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation, feed our deepest hunger. Nourish us to embody you and, like you, become bread for the world. What we claim is a scandal to the world. Make our lives a sign that there is no one else to turn to. For, as Peter says, you have the words of eternal life.

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