

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

By: [Billy McDermott](#)

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### The “Bread of Life” Discourses (fourth of five)

#### Sources:

SCB: ([St Charles](#))

Augustine: (on [Psalm 34](#))

RC: ([Cantalamessa](#))

S: ([Sacerdos](#))

Augustine: ([Tractate 26](#))

SH: ([David Scott & Scott Hahn](#))

S:

- **THEME OF THE READINGS** - The food and wine that divine Wisdom offers to those who are without understanding (*First Reading*) turns out to be the actual flesh and blood of the Word incarnate, in his glorified state. Faced with misunderstanding and rejection, Jesus insists all the more that it is indeed his own flesh and blood he wants to give us (*Gospel*). If, without first comprehending but with faith in his words, we taste his goodness (*Psalm*), we will be filled with the Spirit and advance in the true wisdom that leads to using well the short time we have doing God’s will for us (*First Reading and Second Reading*).

#### **1st Reading - Proverbs 9:1-6**

Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven columns; she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine, yes, she has spread her table. She has sent out her maidens; she calls from the heights out over the city: "Let whoever is simple turn in here; To the one who lacks understanding, she says, Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding."

#### **Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7**

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

Glorify the LORD with me, let us together extol his name. I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame. When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him.

Augustine:

- “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be ever in my mouth” (ver. 1). So speaketh Christ, so also let a Christian speak; for a Christian is in the Body of Christ; and therefore was Christ made Man, that that Christian might be enabled to be an Angel, who saith, “I will bless the Lord at all times.” When shall I “bless the Lord”? When He blesseth thee? When the goods of this world abound? When thou hast great abundance of corn, oil, and wine, of gold and silver, of servants and cattle; when this mortal health remaineth unwounded and sound; when all that are born to thee grow up, nothing is withdrawn by immature death, happiness wholly reigneth in thy house, and all things overflow around thee; then shalt thou bless the Lord? No; but “at all times.” Therefore both then, and when according to the time, or according to the scourges of our Lord God, these things are troubled, are taken away, are seldom born to thee, and born pass away. For these things come to pass, and thence followeth penury, need, labour, pain, and temptation. But thou, who hast sung, “I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall be ever in my mouth,” both when He giveth them, bless; and when He taketh them away, bless. For it is He that giveth, it is He that taketh away: but Himself from him that blesseth Him He taketh not away.
- But wherefore doth man bless the Lord at all times? Because he is humble. What is it to be humble? To take not praise unto himself. Who would himself be praised, is proud: who is not proud, is humble. Wouldest thou not then be proud? That thou mayest be humble, say what is here written; “In the Lord shall my soul be praised: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad” (ver. 2). Those then who will not be praised in the Lord, are not humble, but fierce, rough, lifted up, proud. Gentle cattle would the Lord have; be thou the Lord’s jumentum; that is, be thou humble. He sitteth upon thee, He ruleth thee: fear not lest thou stumble, and fall headlong: that indeed is thy infirmity; but consider Who sitteth upon thee. Thou art an ass’s colt, but thou carriest Christ. For even He on an ass’s colt came into the city; and that beast was gentle. ...”Be not ye as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding.” For horse and mule sometimes lift up their neck, and by their own fierceness throw off their rider. They are tamed with the bit, with bridle, with stripes, until they learn to submit, and to carry their master. But thou, before thy jaws are bruised with the bridle, be humble, and carry thy Lord: wish not praise for thyself, but praised be He who sitteth upon thee, and say thou, “In the Lord shall my soul be praised; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.” ...
- Now followeth, “O magnify the Lord with me” (ver. 3). Who is this that exhorteth us, that we should magnify the Lord with him? Whoever, Brethren, is in the body of Christ, ought for this to labour, that the Lord may be magnified with him. For he loveth the Lord, whoever he is. And how doth he love Him? So as not to envy his fellow-lover. ...Let them blush who so love God as to envy others. Abandoned

men love a charioteer, and whoever loveth a charioteer or hunter, wisheth the whole people to love with him, and exhorteth, saying, Love with me this pantomime, love with me this or that shame. He calleth among the people that shame may be loved with him; and doth not a Christian call in the Church, that the Truth of God may be loved with him? Stir up then love in yourselves, Brethren; and call to every one of yours, and say, "O magnify the Lord with me." Let there be in you that fervour. Wherefore are these things recited and explained? If ye love God, bring quickly to the love of God all who are joined unto you, and all who are in your house; if the Body of Christ is loved by you, that is, if the unity of the Church, bring them quickly to enjoy, and say, "O magnify the Lord with me."

- "And let us exalt His Name together." What is, "let us exalt His Name together"? That is, in one. For many copies so have it, "O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt His Name in one." Whether it be said, "together," or "in one," it is the same thing. Therefore bring quickly whom ye can, by exhorting, by transporting, by beseeching, by disputing, by rendering a reason, with meekness, with gentleness. Bring them quickly unto love; that if they magnify the Lord, they may magnify Him in one. ...
- "I sought the Lord, and He heard me" (ver. 4). Where heard the Lord? Within. Where giveth He? Within. There thou prayest, there thou art heard, there thou art blessed. Thou hast prayed, thou art heard, thou art blessed; and he knoweth not who standeth by thee: it is all carried on in secret, as the Lord saith in the Gospel, "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." When therefore thou enterest into thy chamber, thou enterest into thy heart. Blessed are they who rejoice when they enter into their heart, and find therein nought of evil. ...
- "I sought the Lord, and He heard me." Who then are not heard, seek not the Lord. Attend, Holy Brethren; he said not, I sought gold from the Lord, and He heard me; I sought from the Lord long life, and He heard me; I sought from the Lord this or that, and He heard me. It is one thing to seek anything from the Lord, another to seek the Lord Himself. "I sought" (saith he) "the Lord, and He heard me." But thou, when thou prayest, saying, Kill that my enemy, seekest not the Lord, but, as it were, makest thyself a judge over thy enemy, and makest thy God an executioner. How knowest thou that he is not better than thou, whose death thou seekest? In that very thing haply he is, that he seeketh not thine. Therefore seek not from the Lord anything without, but seek the Lord Himself, and He will hear thee, and while thou yet speakest, He will say, "Lo, here I am." ...
- But let us approach to Him and be lightened; not as the Jews approached to Him, that they might be darkened; for they approached to Him that they might crucify Him: let us approach to Him that we may receive His Body and Blood. They by Him crucified were darkened; we by eating and drinking The Crucified are lightened. "Approach unto Him, and be ye lightened." Lo, this is said to the

- Gentiles. Christ was crucified amid the Jews raging and seeing; the Gentiles were absent; lo, they have approached who were in darkness, and they who saw not are lightened. Whereby approach the Gentiles? By following with faith, by longing with the heart, by running with charity. Thy feet are thy charity. Have two feet, be not lame. What are thy two feet? The two commandments of love, of thy God, and of thy Neighbour. With these feet run thou unto God, approach unto Him, for He hath both exhorted thee to run, and hath Himself shed His Own Light, as he hath magnificently and divinely continued. "And your faces shall not be ashamed." "Approach" (saith he) "unto Him, and be ye lightened; and your faces shall not be ashamed." No face shall be ashamed but of the proud. Wherefore? Because he would be lifted up, and when he hath suffered insult, or ignominy, or mischance in this world, or any affliction, he is ashamed. But fear not thou, approach unto Him, and thou shalt not be ashamed. ...
- As the Prophet testifieth, "The poor man cried, and the Lord heard him" (ver. 6). He teacheth thee how thou mayest be heard. Therefore art thou not heard, because thou art rich. Lest haply thou say, thou criedst and wast not heard, hear wherefore; "The poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." As poor cry thou, and the Lord heareth. And how shall I cry as poor? By not, if thou hast aught, presuming therefrom upon thy own strength: by understanding that thou art needy; by understanding that so long art thou poor, as thou hast not Him who maketh thee rich. But how did the Lord hear him? "And saved him out of all his troubles." And how saveth He men out of all their troubles? "The Angel of the Lord shall send round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them" (ver. 7). So it is written, brethren, not as some bad copies have it, "The Lord shall send His Angel round about them that fear Him, and He shall deliver them:" but thus, "The Angel of the Lord shall send round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them." Whom called He here the Angel of the Lord, who shall send round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them? Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is called in Prophecy, the Angel of the great Counsel, the Messenger of the great Counsel; so the Prophets called Him. Even He then, the Angel of the great Counsel, that is, the Messenger, shall send unto them that fear the Lord, and shall deliver them. Fear not then lest thou be hid: wheresoever thou hast feared the Lord, there doth that Angel know thee, who shall send to succour thee, and shall deliver thee.

## **2nd Reading - Ephesians 5:15-20**

Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

### **Gospel - John 6:51-58**

Jesus said to the crowds: "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."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "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. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 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. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Augustine:

- "And I will raise him up in the last day." I render unto him what he loves, what he hopes for: he will see what, not as yet by seeing, he has believed; he shall eat that which he hungers after; he shall be filled with that which he thirsts after. Where? In the resurrection of the dead; for "I will raise him up on the last day."
- What is that that I say or that I speak, unless He that is within reveal it? Without is the planter of the tree, within is the tree's Creator. He that planteth and He that watereth work from without: this is what we do. But "neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." That is, "they shall be all taught of God." All who? "Every one who has heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." See how the Father draws: He delights by teaching, not by imposing a necessity. Behold how He draws: "They shall be all taught of God." This is God's drawing. "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." This is God's drawing.
- What is that that I say or that I speak, unless He that is within reveal it? Without is the planter of the tree, within is the tree's Creator. He that planteth and He that watereth work from without: this is what we do. But "neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." That is, "they shall be all taught of God." All who? "Every one who has heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." See how the Father draws: He delights by teaching, not by imposing a necessity. Behold how He draws: "They shall be all taught of God." This is God's drawing. "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." This is God's drawing.
- Let what follows admonish us: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath eternal life." He willed to reveal Himself, what He was: He might have said in brief, He that believeth on me hath me. For Christ is Himself true God and eternal life. Therefore, he that believeth on me, saith He, goeth into me; and he that goeth into me, hath me. But what is the meaning of "to have me"? To have

- eternal life. Eternal life took death upon itself; eternal life willed to die; but of thee, not of itself; of thee it received that whereby it may die in thy behalf. Of men, indeed, He took flesh, but yet not in the manner of men. For having His Father in heaven, He chose a mother on earth; both there begotten without mother, and here born without father. Accordingly, life took upon itself death, that life might slay death. "For he that believeth on me," saith He, "hath eternal life:" not what is open, but what is hid. For eternal life is the Word, that "in the beginning was with God, and the Word was God, and the life was the light of men." The same eternal life gave eternal life also to the flesh which it assumed. He came to die; but on the third day He rose again. Between the Word taking flesh and the flesh rising again, death which came between was consumed.
- "I am," saith He, "the bread of life." And what was the source of their pride? "Your fathers," saith He, "did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead." What is it whereof ye are proud? "They ate manna, and are dead." Why they ate and are dead? Because they believed that which they saw; what they saw not, they did not understand. Therefore were they "your" fathers, because you are like them. For so far, my brethren, as relates to this visible corporeal death, do not we too die who eat the bread that cometh down from heaven? They died just as we shall die, so far, as I said, as relates to the visible and carnal death of this body. But so far as relates to that death, concerning which the Lord warns us by fear, and in which their fathers died: Moses ate manna, Aaron ate manna, Phinehas ate manna, and many ate manna, who were pleasing to the Lord, and they are not dead. Why? Because they understood the visible food spiritually, hungered spiritually, tasted spiritually, that they might be filled spiritually. For even we at this day receive visible food: but the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another. How many do receive at the altar and die, and die indeed by receiving? Whence the apostle saith, "Eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." For it was not the mouthful given by the Lord that was the poison to Judas. And yet he took it; and when he took it, the enemy entered into him: not because he received an evil thing, but because he being evil received a good thing in an evil way. See ye then, brethren, that ye eat the heavenly bread in a spiritual sense; bring innocence to the altar. Though your sins are daily, at least let them not be deadly. Before ye approach the altar, consider well what ye are to say: "Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive our debtors." Thou forgivest, it shall be forgiven thee: approach in peace, it is bread, not poison. But see whether thou forgivest; for if thou dost not forgive, thou liest, and liest to Him whom thou canst not deceive. Thou canst lie to God, but thou canst not deceive God. He knows what thou doest. He sees thee within, examines thee within, inspects within, judges within, and within He either condemns or crowns. But the fathers of these Jews were evil fathers of evil sons, unbelieving fathers of unbelieving sons, murmuring fathers of murmurers. For in no other thing is that people said to have offended the Lord more than in murmuring against God. And for that reason, the Lord, willing to show those men to be the children of such murmurers, thus begins His address to them: "Why murmur ye among

yourselves," ye murmurers, children of murmurers? Your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; not because manna was an evil thing, but because they ate it in an evil manner.

- "I am the living bread, which came down from heaven." For that reason "living," because I came down from heaven. The manna also came down from heaven; but the manna was only a shadow, this is the truth. "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." When did flesh comprehend this flesh which He called bread? That is called flesh which flesh does not comprehend, and for that reason all the more flesh does not comprehend it, that it is called flesh. For they were terrified at this: they said it was too much for them; they thought it impossible. "Is my flesh," saith He, "for the life of the world." Believers know the body of Christ, if they neglect not to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ, if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ. None lives by the Spirit of Christ but the body of Christ. Understand, my brethren, what I mean to say. Thou art a man; thou hast both a spirit and a body. I call that a spirit which is called the soul; that whereby it consists that thou art a man, for thou consistest of soul and body. And so thou hast an invisible spirit and a visible body. Tell me which lives of the other: does thy spirit live of thy body, or thy body of thy spirit? Every man that lives can answer; and he that cannot answer this, I know not whether he lives: what doth every man that lives answer? My body, of course, lives by my spirit. Wouldst thou then also live by the Spirit of Christ. Be in the body of Christ. For surely my body does not live by thy spirit. My body lives by my spirit, and thy body by thy spirit. The body of Christ cannot live but by the Spirit of Christ. It is for this that the Apostle Paul, expounding this bread, says: "One bread," saith he, "we being many are one body." O mystery of piety! O sign of unity! O bond of charity! He that would live has where to live, has whence to live. Let him draw near, let him believe; let him be embodied, that he may be made to live. Let him not shrink from the compact of members; let him not be a rotten member that deserves to be cut off; let him not be a deformed member whereof to be ashamed; let him be a fair, fit, and sound member; let him cleave to the body, live for God by God: now let him labor on earth, that hereafter he may reign in heaven.

RC:

- The new element is that to the discourse on bread Jesus adds that of wine; to the image of food he adds that of drink, the gift of his flesh and of his blood. Here, Eucharistic symbolism reaches its culmination and totality.
- What does the word blood mean to us and what does it evoke? In the first place, it evokes all the suffering that exists in the world. If, therefore, in the sign of bread man's work comes to the altar, in the sign of blood all human pain also comes there. It comes to be sanctified and to receive meaning and the hope of rescue thanks to the blood of the immaculate Lamb, to which it is united as drops of water mixed with wine in the chalice.

- But, why, precisely, did Jesus choose wine to signify his blood? Just because of the affinity of color? What does wine represent for men? It represents joy, celebration; it does not represent usefulness so much (as bread does) but delight. It is not only made to drink, but also to toast. Jesus multiplied the loaves because of the people's need, but in Cana he multiplied the wine for the delight of the guests. Scripture says that "wine gladdens man's heart and bread strengthens it" (Psalm 104:15).
- If Jesus had chosen bread and water for the Eucharist, he would only have indicated the sanctification of suffering ("bread and water" are in fact synonymous with fasting, austerity and penance). By choosing bread and wine he also wished to indicate the sanctification of joy. How wonderful it would be if we also learned to live the joys of life in a Eucharistic manner, that is, in thanksgiving to God. God's presence and look do not cloud our honest joys; on the contrary, they enlarge them.
- But, in addition to joy, wine also evokes a grave problem. In the second reading we hear this warning of the Apostle: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." He suggests that inebriation with wine be combated with "the sober inebriation of the Spirit," one inebriation replaced with another.
- At present there are many initiatives of recovery among people with problems of alcoholism. They try to use all the means suggested by science and psychology. They cannot but be encouraged and supported. But those who believe should not neglect the spiritual means, which are prayer, the sacraments and the word of God.
- In the work, "The Russian Pilgrim," a true story is told. A soldier addicted to alcohol and threatened with being discharged went to a holy monk to ask him what he should do to overcome his vice. The monk ordered him to read a chapter of the Gospel every night before going to bed.

The soldier acquired a Gospel and began to read it diligently. But soon after he returned desolate to the monk to tell him: "Father, I am too ignorant and I don't understand anything of what I read! Give me something else to do."

The monk replied: "Just continue reading. You don't understand, but the devils understand and tremble." The soldier did so and was freed from his vice. Why not give this a try?