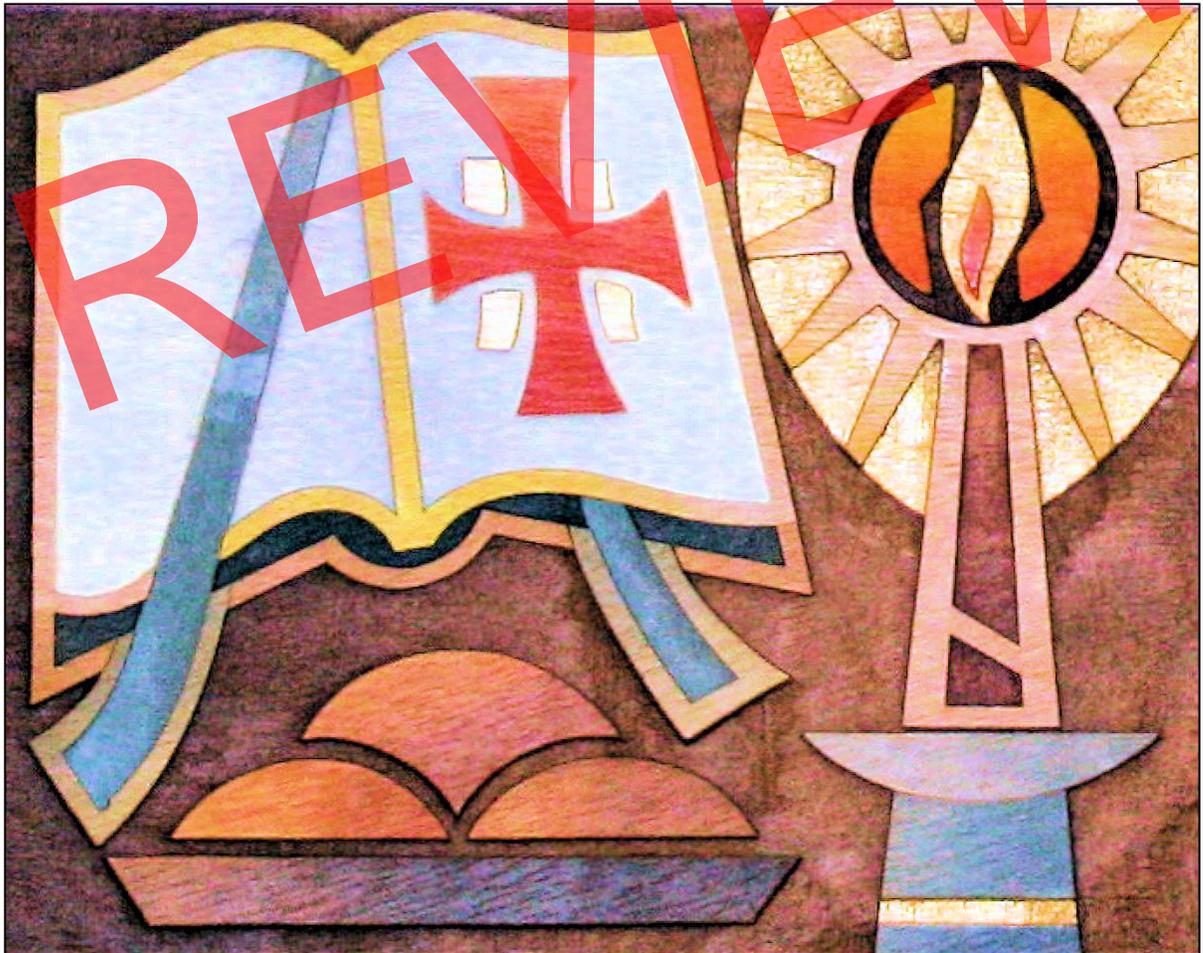


Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of August, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 5, 2018

Read:

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15
Ps 78:3-4, 23-25, 54
Ephesians 4:17, 20-24
John 6:24-35



Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus says: "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." In other words: In your daily life, work hard to obtain whatever will nourish your soul and sustain you past death into eternity.

Jesus says: "The work God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent." Why does he call this "work"?

To fully believe, we must work at getting rid of every doubt and distrust that interferes with our belief in Christ, our trust in his words (including what he inspired in the official teachings of the Church), and our willingness to conform to his way of life.

This work requires (1) identifying our vulnerabilities that make us doubt and distrust, (2) uncovering what we're afraid will happen if we do trust, and (3) overcoming that fear by gaining a better understanding of the truth. Any fear that interferes with our holiness is always based on something untrue.

Jesus says: "The bread of God, which nourishes your soul, is that which comes down from heaven and gives life." He's referring to his presence in the Eucharist, the bread that he provides in every Mass. What do you need to do so that you can be nourished more fully by the Eucharist? Is there something that's stopping you from receiving the Eucharist? Work hard to remedy that obstacle! It will make a difference to your eternal soul. If you're sincere about uniting yourself to Christ, he will make possible whatever is needed to clear the way.

Because the Eucharist is Jesus, it can heal us, purify us, and help us become more like Christ himself. How-

ever, it takes conscious effort to fully embrace this opportunity. Why would we want to be lazy about that? The benefits of hard work in our faith life will endure for eternity.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Do you believe you're going to go to heaven after you die? (If you're thinking "no, I'm going to purgatory" then the answer

is really yes, because purgatory is not a stopping place, it's a purging place before entering into the fullness of heaven.)

† What raises doubts in your mind?

† What in your relationship with Jesus needs more work so that your belief in him will give you confident hope that he is guiding you to heaven?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How has the Eucharist helped you stay on course on your journey to heaven? How has it changed you, purified you?

† Is it possible that Christ's true presence in the Eucharist can also help those who are unable to receive communion? How so?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 12, 2018

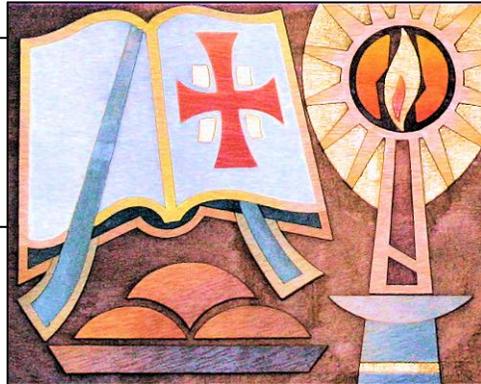
Read:

1 Kings 19:4-8

Ps 34:2-9

Ephesians 4:30--5:2

John 6:41-51



Reflect:

This Gospel reading has Christ's explanation of the Eucharist.

He says: "Whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life." Why does he call the Eucharist "the bread of life"? How does it give us life?

He answers: "Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." In other words, he gave himself to us -- he gave his life for us -- on the cross. Our sins put us on the path of death, but he who was sinless and divine substituted himself for us, taking our deaths upon himself so that we could have the eternal life of God.

The resurrection of his body defeated this death. Therefore, his body, crucified and risen, is the source of our life. This is what we celebrate in Mass. We are not re-enacting his death during the sacrifice of the altar, as some mistakenly assume; we are uniting ourselves to his life.

The "sacrifice of the altar" is our participation in the entirety of Christ: his life, ministry, crucifixion for our sins, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. We unite with him by offering our lives to him so that he ministers to the world through us, sacrificing our will where it interferes with his, which results in being raised up to new life as we follow Christ to heaven.

Every Catholic Mass accomplishes this by providing us with our Savior's body and blood, here and now, in the form of edible food: the bread of life. As Pope John Paul the Great pointed out in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic banquet of Mass is 'the source and summit of the Christian life'."

This holy communion comes to us from Christ's Last Supper, through generation after generation of the apostolic priesthood, which began with the very first Apostles. Everyone who attends the liturgy of this communion should truly celebrate the Eucharistic presence of Jesus, even those who still have work to do to remove the obstacles that keep them from receiving the Eucharist bodily.

Christ is as fully present and as truly real here as he was when he sat among the Apostles and said, "This is my Body, this is my Blood." Thus anyone who adores and honors Jesus in the Eucharist, believing that he is their Savior, is feasting on the source of their eternal life.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † How do you know that the Eucharist is truly the center of your life?
- † What's missing from your current experience of meeting Jesus in person in the miracle that takes place on the altar?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How has the Eucharist been life-giving for you? Share how Jesus has healed you or revealed himself to you or nurtured you through his presence in the consecrated bread, either in Holy Communion or during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. How do you know it was really him? How did it change you?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 19, 2018

Read:

Proverbs 9:1-6

Ps 34:2-7

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Reflect:

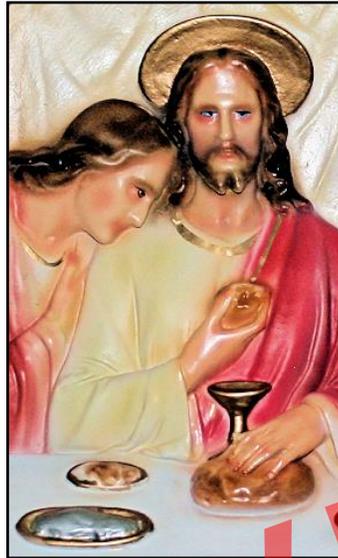
In this Sunday's Gospel reading, we hear the Great Eucharistic Command. Jesus says: "Those who feed on me will have life because of me." What kind of life? What's the difference between having *his* life and the one you were born with?

Jesus gives us his body and blood in every Mass so that we can consume him in his entirety -- all of his humanity and all of his divinity. He wants us to be nourished abundantly by his love. He wants us to receive his strength when we endure trials, his healing when we suffer wounds, and most of all, his *life*, not just when we go to Heaven, but here and now on Earth.

Consuming Jesus should transform us into his likeness. If we truly believe that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus our Savior, then why would we leave Mass unchanged?

By consciously participating in the Penance Rite at the beginning of Mass, actively listening to the readings of the Word of God, sincerely praying with the priest, and trusting in the power of God when we say, "Lord, I am not worthy ... but say the word and my soul shall be healed," and then consuming the Eucharist with humility and awe, we become one with his body and blood.

Now we, too, are his body and blood on earth, ready for others to consume us, or to put it more accurately, giving them the opportunity to be nourished by the True Presence of Jesus within us.



When we give love to others, they receive God's love. When they fail to return that love, we are being consumed! We are giving more than we're receiving. Similarly, when we give of our time and talents for the sake of God's kingdom without being paid or rewarded, we are being Eucharist. We are one in body and blood with Jesus.

Being consumed without being destroyed is possible only if we receive from Jesus what others fail to give to us. This is why the Eucharistic celebration of Mass is our true nourishment. It needs to be the source and the summit of our lives.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How similar to Jesus are you?

† What in God's personality do you need to consume more of so that you can become more like him? Ask for it whenever you go to Mass!

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Share the story of a time when you gave more than you received. How was this Christ-like? Why does it mean you were Eucharist for others?

† How does receiving Jesus during Mass fill us up so that we can continue giving without being depleted?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 26, 2018

Read:

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-18b
Ps 34:2-3, 16-21 (with 9a)
Ephesians 5:21-32
John 6:60-69



Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, we see the tragic rejection of Christ's true mission by many who had been listening to him and watching him. How could they miss the message that he taught? "The words I have spoken are Spirit and life," he said. But they only heard his words on the surface level, in their flesh-nature. And thus they missed the life that he was offering: the healed life, the joyful life, the victorious life, the eternal life.

They weren't looking at Jesus spiritually. They saw him as a man, not a messiah, as a healer of bodies, not of souls, as a deliverer from the Romans instead of from their own sins.

Thus, the idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood (which he had spoken of in the previous verses, in last Sunday's readings) truly was gross and unthinkable. They couldn't grasp the Spirit and life behind those words. It seemed that Jesus had become too bizarre to follow.

The true disciples -- those who remained to learn more from him -- also didn't understand what he meant, not yet, but they recognized the presence of the Holy Spirit in his words.

How many times has Jesus come to you in another person and you didn't recognize him, because what you saw was the human individual and what you focused on was the un-Christ-like behaviors of that person?

Everyone has been created in the image of God. They would not be alive if the Holy Spirit had not given them life. Even non-Christians have the presence of Christ

in them. To live a more victorious life, we have to look beneath the surface to find the Jesus who is hidden inside everyone we meet.

Do you have any difficulty recognizing the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass? Practice recognizing Jesus when he comes to you in others, and you will see the Eucharist in new ways.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." How has the Father gifted you with the ability to recognize Jesus?

† What has happened in your life that opened your eyes to who Jesus really is?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What blocks our view of Jesus when he comes to us through others? What expectations get in the way? What disappointments? What prejudices?

† Share with your group a time when you learned to see past the flesh to discover Jesus in someone you didn't like. What led to this discovery?

Comments/Prayer Requests: