

CCV John 6:51-58

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

What do you want right now? What are you hoping for, longing for, desiring? Perhaps a promotion at work or a new job? A nice holiday with good food and good weather? A quiet evening without the children? A couple of days with the grandchildren? A partner that loves and cares for you? A health problems resolved? A way to pay off that mortgage? It could be any of those things and more.

We all have many good and healthy hopes, dreams and desires, but then there comes another question, why do you want those things? What is it about these things that excites our longings and motivates us to get up in the morning? Because let's face it, these are the things that do motivate us to get up in the morning, perhaps far more than we know. Well, there are all kinds of explanations for those desires. We have deep psychological, perhaps evolutionary, motives to yearn for rest, beauty and love. These are all natural, healthy and good desires. I hope you get the things you've been thinking about that you want.

But the words of Jesus in the Gospel reading fundamentally challenge our relationship to those things. Because Jesus says "I am the living bread. Jesus is what truly feeds and sustains us. Bread was a staple food of Jesus' culture. It represents our most fundamental need. Jesus is saying that he is the thing we most truly need. He is the food that gives life. He is what our most basic need, that is our need for food, points us to, and so he's the thing that all our other needs point to as well. He is the thing which we are truly longing for when we want food or rest or companionship.

Think about some simple food you really enjoy. It might well be some sort of bread, perhaps with a dark, crunchy, crust and soft springy, inside, perhaps toasted so it's warm and crispy. Or maybe a flat bread, warm from the oven, soft and stretchy. Or a crackly, crispy bread, that crumbles in the hand into delicious crumbs you sweep up with your fingers. Or maybe for you, your simple, basic food isn't bread. But whatever it is, why do you like it? Perhaps, because it's nourishing, satisfying, homely and tasty. And that shows that we were made with a deep longing for the one thing that is truly nourishing, satisfying, homely and tasty. And that is Jesus. Jesus nourishes our deepest longings. He satisfies the aches of our hearts. He is tastier than any food could be. He doesn't just feel like home, he is home. We want bread, we want that simple nourishing food, because our hearts were made for nourishment, for tastiness, for home. In other words, our hearts were made for Jesus.

And we can receive Jesus because of his death and resurrection. That's why he talks so much about his flesh and blood.

V.51 "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

His flesh is his crucified body; it's at his death that he truly becomes our living bread.

And when we feed on the flesh of Christ, what happens? Well, so much, according to Jesus' teaching.

V.54 "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."

If we feed on Christ, we live for ever. We need not fear death. His eternal flesh was broken, so ours can be eternally whole.

V.56 "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and in them."

If we feed on the flesh of Jesus we are in him and he in us. We are mysteriously, spiritually united to him. We are never alone. We draw strength from him and he imparts life and love and joy to us.

V.57 "Just as the living Father send me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me."

When we feed on Jesus, we receive life from him, just as he receives it from the Father. We share with Jesus, what he shares with the Father. We begin to share in the relationships of the Trinity. The three persons of God have lived together for all eternity in a perfect relationship of perfect love. And as we feed on Christ, we get to share in that. By feeding on Jesus, we are welcomed into the Trinity.

Feeding on Jesus brings us into loving, joyful union with him and the Father, now and for all eternity.

He is the thing that truly sustains, comforts and nourishes us, even more than basic food.

Now perhaps you're listening to this and you're asking the question, yes but how. OK, Michael, you're saying, feed on Jesus, but what does that mean? How do we feed on Jesus? And in particular, how does it relate to what we're about to do at the altar, when I will bless and break the bread?

I think there's room for different beliefs about that in the church, so what I'm sharing is my opinion, which you might not agree with.

Presumably, it must have something to do with this meal that we're about to share. I'm sure that the words we're reading reflect what Jesus actually said that day preaching to the crowds, but nevertheless John has recorded them in his own way for his own audience. And by the time he did that, Eucharistic meals, not unlike ours, would have been a basic part of the church's regular worship, just as they are for us. John's audience couldn't read these words and not think of the Eucharist or holy communion. And John knew that when he recorded Jesus' words in the way he did.

On the other hand, I don't think that eating from this meal is the only way to feed on Jesus or automatically makes you feed on Jesus. The way we feed on Jesus is by faith. We trust him and try to obey him. Jesus says in v.47 and 48 "Truly I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life." To believe in Jesus and seek to obey him, that is feeding on him. That is eating his flesh.

If you grabbed someone off the street without faith in Christ and bribed them with a thousand euros to receive communion, I don't think they'd be feeding on Christ. Similarly, when Covid prevented us gathering for communion, I think we were still feeding on Christ. We feed on Christ by faith.

But what does that faith look like in practice? Well, it includes eating this bread and wine. Jesus commanded us to eat this meal, so if we believe in him, we will do just that. Eating this meal expresses our faith in a very profound way and it's a way he has appointed to nourish and nurture and sustain us. He has promised to be specially present in this bread and wine and he has promised that those who eat it partake of him. Patrick and I don't have magical powers to zap Jesus into this bread and wine. We are simply very ordinary people who have been chosen by Jesus' church to say the words Jesus taught us over the bread and wine and to break the bread and share it just as he did. And simply because we're doing what Jesus told us to do, this bread and wine are deeply significant ways for us to feed on Jesus.

The reason we surround this act with drama and ritual is because Jesus has said it is the way we feed on him and therefore it's important. So we treat it as important. The robes, the music and the ceremonial do not make the bread and wine special. They are already special, because Jesus has said they are. The liturgical drama, the ritual, with which we surround this meal is all there to remind us it's special, to help us experience feeding on Christ as we eat it. I want to extend thanks on behalf of us all to our musicians, sacristans, vergers and all who work behind the scenes to make our worship so beautiful.

As we close, I invite you today, to feed on Jesus. Feed on Jesus, and receive life. Feed on Jesus and be united with him and the Father and receive eternal life. One excellent way to do that is thoughtfully, reverently and prayerfully to receive this meal. If you've never done it before, do get baptised and prepared first. Do talk to me or

Patrick about that. But if you now or in the past regularly receive in a church that believes the doctrine of the Trinity, please do come forward.

If you know you have wandered from Jesus and are seeking sustenance elsewhere, then come back to him. Feed on him for life eternal. Feed on Jesus by faith and at this altar. If you are fearful of the future, if you are fearful of death, then feed on Jesus. His flesh is eternal life. Feed on Jesus by faith and at this altar. If you want to grow in confidence and power to serve God and others, then feed on Jesus. His flesh is true food and his blood is true drink. Feed on Jesus by faith and at this altar. If you want Jesus' presence with you, sustaining you and supporting you, in joy and in sorrow, then feed on him. Feed on Jesus, by faith, and at this altar.