

John 6:51-69

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text this morning is following in John's Gospel from the last few weeks, "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

I make no secret of my love for comic books and cheesy action movies. There is a common trope within both kinds of stories wherein the villain and the hero have the big climactic fight scene and the hero is victorious by knocking the villain off a ledge of some kind. But behold! The villain did not fall to his death but instead grabbed onto the ledge. The hero, being a hero and valuing the life of all people, even his enemy leans down to rescue his would-be killer. Of course, this usually ends with either the villain being pulled up and showing his gratitude by attacking the hero with a hidden weapon of some sort, or the villain chooses death for himself and wrenches his hand out of the grip of our hero, plummeting to his apparent doom. It is a common theme in many stories, one that I'm sure at least a few of you have seen.

In our text today, we see the crowd and even some of Jesus' disciples wrench their hand out of his grasp as he is trying

to save them. This is the conclusion of Jesus' teaching about his body and blood, pointing us to the Sacrament of the Altar, and how do the people respond? John tells us, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." To be fair, this is a difficult thing for people to wrap their minds around. It is even difficult for many of us to consider and ponder.

But notice how Jesus speaks of his body and blood here. He doesn't say that this is a nice thing to do. He doesn't say that this is some ridiculous ceremony or tradition that his people need to do. He doesn't say this in the context of allusion, metaphor, or illustration. He says, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides

in me, and I in him.” There is a reason that the Church fathers spoke of Communion as the medicine of immortality!

When we gather here to worship and when we come here for Communion, there is so much more going on than our human eyes can perceive. There is grace here. There is beauty here. There is divine activity going on in our midst. But so often we fail to recognize these things because they aren't what we want to see. We want to see miracles like seas parting. We want to see mana from heaven sitting on the ground. We want to see the sick being healed and demons cast out. If we could just see those things, then everything would be good, right? If we could just have a few great big signs, then there would be no more room for doubt.

But dear friends, we see something better than the waters parting as God claims people as his own through the waters of baptism. We see the bread from heaven as it is not just left lying

on the ground, but is placed into your hands every week. Our sin sick souls are cleansed by this healing flood of baptismal waters and the feast of Christ's body and blood. The demons are thrown down and cast away when they are confronted with the pure and true light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his death for us on the cross.

This place, this room is more than just a room with white walls and blue carpet. It is more than just a collection of pews and chairs in front of a small altar area. Because of the presence of God, this place is the very entrance into heaven itself! There is a reason that we say in the communion liturgy that we join our voices with the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. We say that because that is what we are doing! That is who is here with us! We are standing in the very presence of God himself as we receive the gifts that he has called us together to receive.

We see miracles here almost every single Sunday. We see people who were spiritually dead made alive again. We see Christ come to us. Our sins are removed from us as far as the East is from the West. But these are things that are seen only with the eyes of faith. These are things that we perceive only because we have the promise of Christ that it is true. No, this isn't a great spectacle. This isn't entertainment. It is so much better than that. And there is no place that we should rather be than right here to be part of this!

Too often we Christians come to take these things for granted. We think that the church service is too long or that communion isn't really an important part of our life together. But if we rightly understand what is happening in the service, that it is the time for God to come to his people and serve us, then how could we ever even imagine not being here or complain about being here? If we take Jesus at his Word in our

text today that his body and blood give us eternal life, how could we ever simply limply hang out our hands and roughly grab this little bit of bread or disinterestedly take a drink?

Such thoughts are not from God, but they are from Satan.

He would have us leave Christ behind so that we could be comfortable or take his gifts with little appreciation or sincerity. It is easy to be like the disciples who left Jesus that day because his teaching was too hard. Truly, being a Christian is hard. The sad truth is that many of us are just now starting to see how hard it is. The hatred of the world for Christ and his followers is becoming more and more open. As it becomes clear that the cares of this world will always be there to choke the faith out of us, it is easy to become like the land covered in thorns that Jesus speaks of in his parable of the sower.

But in our text today and for the past few weeks, Jesus has not been teaching with parables. He hasn't been speaking in

imagery or concealed meaning. He speaks clearly, plainly, and openly. When the crowd comes and complains that his teaching is hard, he doesn't explain it to them. Even when Jesus speaks to his faithful disciples, he doesn't explain this further because it needs no explanation.

Rather, "Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." And Peter spoke rightly. His words have become part of the worship life of the Church. Jesus is the only means for eternal life. There is no one else that we can go to, even if we wanted to. It doesn't matter how hard Jesus' teachings are, his is the only way. His hand is the only one there for us to grab.

Of course, too often we may find ourselves like the villain who is pulled to safety and immediately betrays his savior. We rejoice in the salvation that is given to us and then we leave here

and spend the rest of the week as though we did not know Jesus. We betray him by willfully giving sin a foothold in our lives and giving in to all kinds of wickedness and then trying to explain it away and justify it to ourselves. But nonetheless, Jesus continues to bear with us. He calls us to repentance again and again. He faithfully forgives our sins when we come to him in true repentance. But we also remember that God is not mocked. He knows our hearts and he knows whether or not we are repentant. The problem is that we can't always see this within each other.

And this is why we do not spend our time trying to examine our brothers and sisters in the faith for every possible sin or error. When we see them, we urge them to repentance, but we don't go out of our way to look for it because we rightly should be keeping our eyes focused on Jesus. We keep our eyes on the

one who has the words of eternal life. We keep our eyes focused on the one who taught the hard things.

Including the hard teaching that it is necessary for the Son of Man to suffer and die. His body and blood that he speaks of in our text today and that he gave to his disciples at the Last Supper was sacrificed for you and for me at the cross. The very same body and blood that we receive every Sunday is the body and blood that bore your sins at the cross. It is the same body and blood that rose again from the tomb three days later. It is nothing less than our Lord himself and he willingly and mercifully gives it to you today!

This is not something that we can see with our eyes. It is not something that is accompanied by a beam of light and the chorus of angels. But it is here and it is for you who believe in the presence of Christ in this Sacrament and who are united with us in doctrine and faith just as the disciples were one when

Christ gave them this gift the first time. And so, we receive this gift with all due reverence and appreciation because we hold in our hands the very medicine of immortality, the means by which God grants us life eternal.

This eternal life is again something that is ours now even if we can't see it. The righteousness of Christ is ours now, today, even if we do not see the robe of Christ's righteousness on our frame. We have this life already by the faith that we have received from the Spirit and we will see it in full on the day of Christ's return, the day of the resurrection of all flesh. On that day we will be raised in bodies that bear the righteousness that is ours now. We will be raised in bodies no longer marred by sin, illness, or pain. We shall be like our God knows us to be already because of the wonderful mercies of Christ our savior who died for us, who lives for us, and who has freely redeemed all of us.

Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep
your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life
everlasting. Amen.