

For the last two weeks and now for the remaining three weeks, we have been and will continue to hear from the gospel of St. John. This happens every three years in order to supplement the gospel of St. Mark which is too short to last us an entire year. The particular section of John from which we have been hearing is one of the most important chapters in all of the New Testament. It begins with the miracle of the multiplication where Jesus feeds 5000 people from a few loaves and fishes. What is significant in this account is that we are told they are out in the wilderness and that they are hungry. By Jesus feeding them, primarily with bread, they would have been instantly reminded of their former days of Exodus, wandering through the desert being fed by manna from heaven.

We are then told that following this miraculous episode, the crowd follows Jesus back to the mainland where the people are curious about Jesus' true identity and origins, for they were expecting their freedom from Roman occupation to be like a new Exodus, with a new Moses who feeds them with new manna. Could Jesus have been their new Moses? So they ask Him about the bread with which He had fed them; was this the new manna- the sign of Moses' return? Jesus' answer startled them and continues to shock everyone who hears it to this very day, "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. I AM the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; *and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my*

*flesh.*” They thought they were entering a new Exodus; and they were. They thought Jesus might have been the new Moses; and He was. They thought He would feed them with new manna; and He did AND CONTINUES to do so today. Except this new manna is more than bread: it is His very flesh given up for us. It is the Holy Communion of our Eucharist.

Paragraph 1374 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." This presence is called 'real'...” At each Mass, by the power a priest receives through his ordination, in uttering the words of consecration, the bread and wine are transformed into the true Body and Blood of Christ. This is not a figure of speech or meant to be interpreted symbolically. On the fundamental level of substance, after the Eucharistic prayer, the bread ceases to be bread and the wine ceases to be wine- they then possess only the appearance and likeness of such because, on the level of *how they exist*, they are now the Body and Blood of Christ. It is Jesus in disguise.

A reverse analogy may be helpful. Consider a man who has been tragically disfigured in a terrible fire. Perhaps he has lost certain appendages, his skin is now very different and his face is unrecognizable from before. Now imagine that man is your brother. Has the fire changed the fact *that* he is your brother? He

seems nothing like before; but he is obviously still your brother because on the level of his substance- how he exists- he remains. It is the same but *in reverse* with the Eucharist. Instead of the outward appearance completely changing but remaining what it is substantially, by the power of the Holy Spirit, ONLY the appearance remains and, in fact, it substantially becomes something else; rather, it becomes some *ONE* else: our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is possible quite simply because Jesus is God. He says repeatedly that the new manna will be His flesh. If he has power to heal the blind, cure the lame and raise the dead, surely He has power to change bread into Himself. And finally, at the Last Supper, we are told that "He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said THIS IS MY BODY". The people who heard this discourse were mesmerized by the miracle of the multiplication and, at least to a certain degree, wanted to see another one. And wouldn't you?!

Don't we all, deep down inside, just wish, at least sometimes, that we could see God perform a miracle before our very eyes which would remind us of His supreme power? My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you have! In fact you do, each time you attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In mere moments you will witness this miracle again where I, a humble human being, will take bread and a chalice of wine in my hands, and through indescribable power, transform

them on their most real level- because the level that we see is actually weaker than the one we cannot see.

Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of this miracle is that, despite the fact that Jesus could have transformed anything into Himself, He chose bread and wine; food and drink. Wouldn't it make more sense for Christ to have made priests able to do the same thing with, say, a crucifix? Imagine I could hold a cross in my hands and make it substantially His Body and then we could all look at it and adore Him? It would make more sense, if Christ only wanted to be adored. But He wants more.

He made it such that we would not only see Him- but eat Him. Take Him into our very bodies and allow Him to *transform us from within*. St. Cajetan once said, "He gave himself to be our food; unhappy is the one who is unaware of so great a gift." Today, be extra attentive to what is actually happening on this holy altar; the marvelous miracle performed before your very eyes. Next week, we will consider what the implications are of eating the Eucharistic flesh and drinking the Eucharistic blood of the Son of God. What *do* we mean when we stand in that line and say, "Amen"?