

# Daily Readings and Reflections

## Month of Mini-Retreats

### Week 5

#### *The Institution of the Eucharist*

**Sunday, July 29**

##### **Reading**

Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.” So they said to him, “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:

‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

John 6:22-33

##### **Reflection**

In Exodus 16 we see that less than a week after the Lord leads the Israelites out of Egypt, they are asking to go back. They had seen God perform some of the most awe inspiring miracles recorded in the Bible, but thirst and hunger disrupted their faith. They convinced themselves that going back to Egypt would be better than what God had planned for them. Today, we read about the Ancient Israelites and wonder how they could so quickly forget what God had done for them. But aren't we the same? We start out amazed at God's plan for our lives and the salvation he has given us through Jesus. Then the wonder and awe fade. Our memories become less clear, and we start grumbling about all of the things God isn't doing for us. And just like he did for the Israelites, God gives us Bread from Heaven. And just like the Israelites, we still grumble and complain and demand signs before we will believe. This week we will read about and meditate on the Bread that gives us life, and the sacrament that is the Source and Summit of our faith.

##### **Meditation**

- What are some of wonderful things God has done for me throughout my life? How can I use these memories to increase my trust in God?
- How can I shift the focus of my daily life to the blessings God is giving me rather than the prayers he has not answered yet?

**Monday, July 30**

##### **Reading**

So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not

lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day.”

John 6:34-40

### **Reflection**

Just like the Israelites did, we hunger and thirst. Most of the time, though, our hunger and thirst is not physical. It is spiritual. We feel the emptiness in us that is caused by sin. As we cling more tightly to that sin we feel that emptiness more profoundly, and the hunger pangs and thirst become stronger. Then we try to feed our hunger and quench our thirst with the things of this world, but it is never enough. We are feeding ourselves food that perishes. If we truly want to fill our emptiness, we must go to Jesus. The true Bread of Life is the only one who can stop the hunger and thirst. Even if we don't realize it initially, that hunger and thirst is for him, not for the things of this world. And unlike this world, Jesus will never reject us. As long as we keep coming to him he will feed us, he will strengthen us, and he will give us life.

### **Meditation**

- Do I try to fill my spiritual hunger and quench my spiritual thirst with the things of this world? Have these things ever truly satisfied me?
- How can I turn to Jesus each day to satisfy my spiritual hunger and thirst?

## **Tuesday, July 31**

### **Reading**

The Jews murmured about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” and they said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” Jesus answered and said to them, “Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets:

‘They shall all be taught by God.’

Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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.”

John 6:41-51

### **Reflection**

In his General Audience on January 31, 2018, Pope Francis explains that, “When the Word of God is being read from the Bible — the First Reading, the Second Reading, the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel — we must listen, open our heart because it is God himself who is speaking to us...” He goes on to say, “The pages of the Bible cease to be writings and become living words, spoken by God. It is God, who through the reader, speaks to us and questions us, we who listen with faith. The Spirit ‘who has spoken through the prophets’ and has inspired the sacred authors makes the Word of God that ‘we hear outwardly have its effect inwardly.’ But in order to listen to the Word of God, we also need our heart to be open to receive the Word in our heart. God speaks and we listen to him, in order to then put into practice what we have heard. It is very important to listen.” Of course, it is also important to read God's word outside of Mass. It helps us to more fully understand when the Word is read during Mass. The word comes alive most powerfully during the Mass, though, because it is during the Mass that the Word of God finds its fulfillment in the Eucharist, which is the Bread that comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world.

### **Meditation**

- How can I avoid getting distracted in Mass during the Liturgy of the Word (the First Reading, the Second Reading, the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel)?
- How can I prepare myself for Mass in such a way that my heart is open to the Word of God?

## Wednesday, August 1

### Reading

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." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

John 6:52-59

### Reflection

Before we can understand what a powerful moment this must have been, we must pause and try to see it through the eyes of Jesus' Jewish followers. Their entire lives they had heard the story of the Passover. Of how God commanded the enslaved Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb, spread its blood on the doorposts of their homes, and eat the roasted flesh of the lamb. They had grown up hearing the story of how God had fed their ancestors manna - bread from heaven - while they were in the desert. They also knew that all of these things foreshadowed the New Covenant that God would make with his people. Yet Jesus still felt the need to ease them into the reality that he would be both the new Bread from Heaven and the new sacrificial Lamb all in one. First he explains that God again gives Bread from Heaven, and just as everything in the New Covenant will surpass that of the Old, this Bread from Heaven will give them eternal life instead of only physical life. Then he explains that he is the Bread of Life. This confuses the disciples a little bit, and Jesus knows that he is starting to lose some of the disciples, but he continues to explain. He clarifies that he is not just the Bread of Life in a symbolic way. He is the Bread of Life in a physical sense. So much so that to eat the Bread of Life you must eat his flesh. He is telling the disciples that, just as they did in the Old Covenant, they must eat the flesh of the sacrificial Lamb to participate in the New Covenant. This confused the disciples even more. When the disciples questioning gets more intense, Jesus continues to reiterate that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life. He is not using a metaphor, simile, or parable. He is speaking literally. As we will see tomorrow, this is just too much for some of his disciples.

### Meditation

Spend a few minutes trying to put yourself in the shoes of those who were listening to Jesus. Would you have been shocked? Would you have seen that Jesus was telling you that he is the Messiah? Would you have been confused? How would you have reacted to his words?

## Thursday, August 2

### Reading

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:60-69

### Reflection

Yesterday we meditated on what our reaction to Jesus' words would be. Today we see that many of his disciples could not accept what he was saying. The more difficult Jesus' teachings became the deeper their disbelief became until they could no longer follow Jesus. They went back to their old way of life. In contrast, the Twelve (with the exception of Judas the Betrayer) came to believe in Jesus more and more. Even though they could all have also returned to their old lives, their belief in Jesus was so strong that any alternative to following him seemed impossible. The more they followed Jesus and opened their hearts to the Word, the more they came to believe he was truly the Messiah. They began to trust him. They no longer needed signs or explanations. They could see the difference between their old lives and their new lives with Jesus. We make the same kinds of decisions every day. In each of our actions we either choose to follow Jesus or fall back into our old way of doing things. We choose to open our hearts to the Truth, no matter how difficult, or we walk away. Following Jesus is not easy. It requires believing when many around us are walking away. But the reward of our faith is immeasurable.

### **Meditation**

- How can I choose to follow Jesus each day through my words and actions?
- How do I react to the difficult teachings of Jesus and the Church?

### **Friday, August 3**

### **Reading**

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."  
Luke 22:14-20

### **Reflection**

Sunday through Wednesday of this week we read what is known as the Bread of Life Discourse. This took place around the time of the Passover a year before the Last Supper, which we read about today. The Twelve, called the apostles here, are now celebrating another Passover with Jesus. Over the last year, he has prepared them for this moment. He has explained to them that he must die a terrible death but that he will rise on the third day. It is through the sacrifice of his life and his resurrection that God's people will have life. And now his hour has come. It is time for him to offer himself up as the Unblemished Lamb. Now he is showing the Apostles that, just as the Passover of old was only completed when the sacrificial lamb was eaten, the New Passover will only be completed when they eat the Body of the Lamb of God. And just as the Jewish people continued to celebrate the Passover with the understanding that their celebration joined them to the original Passover, we continue to celebrate our New Passover knowing that our sacrifice is one with the sacrifice that began at the Last Supper. The Catechism explains it this way: "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.'" (CCC 1323) But just as with everything else, the new is always better than the old. "By the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all." (CCC 1326)

### **Meditation**

Spend a few minutes meditating the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, and how we offer this sacrifice through the Mass by partaking in the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist.

## Saturday, August 4

### Reading

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:13-16,27-35

### Reflection

Today's reflection, the final one, consists of excerpts from Pope St. John Paul II's apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*:

"Amid our questions and difficulties, and even our bitter disappointments, the divine Wayfarer continues to walk at our side, opening to us the Scriptures and leading us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God. When we meet him fully, we will pass from the light of the Word to the light streaming from the "Bread of life", the supreme fulfilment of his promise to 'be with us always, to the end of the age.'

When the disciples on the way to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay 'with' them, he responded by giving them a much greater gift: through the Sacrament of the Eucharist he found a way to stay 'in' them. Receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. 'Abide in me, and I in you.' This relationship of profound and mutual 'abiding'" enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth. Is this not the greatest of human yearnings? Is this not what God had in mind when he brought about in history his plan of salvation? God has placed in human hearts a "hunger" for his word, a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be "sated" with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfilment in heaven.

It is significant that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, duly prepared by our Lord's words, recognized him at table through the simple gesture of the 'breaking of bread'. When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to 'speak'. The Eucharist unfolds in a dynamic context of signs containing a rich and luminous message. Through these signs the mystery in some way opens up before the eyes of the believer.

The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, 'set out immediately', in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization."

### Meditation

- Do I turn to Jesus in the Eucharist during the difficult times in my life?
- How can I 'set out immediately' to report all I have seen and heard?