

“Bon Appétit” St. John 6:24-35

²⁴ Now when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus. ²⁵ And upon finding him alongside of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you: you are seeking me, not because you saw the signs, but rather because you ate the bread and had your fill. ²⁷ Work not for the food that perishes but for the food that abides even unto eternal life, that which the Son of Man will give you, for upon him God the Father has placed his seal.” ²⁸ So they said to him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them and said, “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one whom he has sent.” ³⁰ Then they said to him, “What sign do you therefore perform, that we may see and believe you? What do you work?” ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but rather my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will by no means go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never go thirsty.”

In the Name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Introduction.

I am a huge, huge fan of food. Huge fan. This probably does not come as a major surprise to any of you. For one, I am a man, and we know that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Second, I am an American, and our reputation for loving barbaric fast food unfortunately precedes us. Third, despite what the billowing folds of my ministerial robes might suggest, I am not what most would call, “petite”. I have instead I have what you might call “bon appétit”. But in any event, I love food, and I am going to make a wild guess and say that you, in some way, probably do too. And this delight in food, I would venture to suggest, is God-given to us because, having created food for a delightful purpose, he delights in it and in us when we enjoy it as he intended.

And yet as I have grown older, and as my tastes have matured in time, I have come to realize that there is a difference between being “full” and being “satisfied”. As a kid, I mostly just wanted to stuff my face with food, the sweeter the better, until my stomach revolted and I could barely push any more in. But as I have grown and begun listening better to my body, to its appetites, desires, and needs, I realize that it is possible to be full of food and yet still want more, and at the same time it is possible to have just a bit of the absolute best and need nothing else. Just because I am full does not mean that my appetite has been fulfilled.

Now, when I think about our lives today, living in the twenty-first century, plunging headlong into an increasingly fast-paced and rapidly changing world, it seems to me, and you might agree, that our tendency is to lead lives that are completely full while we ourselves are at the same time left completely unsatisfied. We work long hours, make many friends, make many enemies, make lots of

money, spend lots of money, waste lots of money, and waste life in the process. Our lives fill up as quickly and easily as filling up a jug of water, and they come to an end as quickly as you can pour that jug out. And in the meanwhile: where is satisfaction? Where is blissful contentment? Where can I go to have the deepest longings of my soul, even of my body, fulfilled and met so that I want no more?

There are few answers out there that work. Modern humanism and scientific naturalism would tell us to lower our expectations and come to grips with an unsatisfying world. Buddhism and other pagan perspectives would have us ignore and deny those very deny that lack fulfillment, choosing “nothing” over satisfaction. And countless vehicles of escape are always ready to convince us that substances, sex, or success can offer us the fulfillment that we seek, when all they do is further empty us of what we most need in this world.

But despite our desperately unsatisfied state, Jesus has a powerful message for us in our Gospel lesson this morning, so long as we can stomach it: **if you come to Jesus for life, you will be satisfied forever**. By this point in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus has just performed a crazy, mind-blowing miracle by feeding five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Then, after the crowds call him “The Prophet” and try to make him King, he escapes to Capernaum by walking (no joke) upon the water. And yet when the crowd shows up, it is painfully obvious that though fish and bread have filled them, they are still not satisfied because they have not truly taken hold of Christ in the process.

But Jesus still bids them to come to his Table, to feast on his Life, to find everlasting satisfaction with him at his Father’s bosom. And today, here and now, he makes the same offer of life and satisfaction to us if we fall down before his feet and put our trust in him. Still, we who live lives that tend to be full rather than fulfilled might want to ask the question, “Why is it Jesus alone who can slake my soul’s thirst and satisfy her deepest longings? Who is he that he can do what no other has been able to perform?”

2. Jesus is the Giver.

Well, we can see that Jesus is able to satisfy fully first because *he gives the bread of life*. He gives that which produces eternal life. Just as he promised the Samaritan woman water that would forever quench her thirst, he promises all those who hear his words that he will provide them with “bread that abides even unto eternal life”. This bread, he says, has the remarkable and magnificent property such that, unlike regular bread, or even the manna in the wilderness, it will never spoil or go bad. This bread is imperishable and incorruptible, and those who eat it will become similarly imperishable and incorruptible.

But there is a problem. When the people in the crowd hear of this divine bread that can give eternal life, their reaction is poignantly typical of us humans: “What must we do to work the works of God?” Having been given bread out of thin air,

the crowd now hears of this miraculous bread that abides forever, and they long to have it. But they only want it on their terms.

You see, the crowd hears of this bread, and their rather badly hidden goal is to be in charge of how they receive that bread. They want to know what *they* must do to receive the bread of life, which requirements to fulfill, which conditions to meet, so that they will always have power to satisfy their gluttonous desires and do as they wish without restraint.

Of course the truth, given how God created us in the beginning, and even more so now that we have been corrupted by sin, is that we are incapable of satisfying our own desires ourselves. The more we seek to satisfy our own needs, passions, and appetites, the less our thirst is slaked, and the more enslaved we are in fact to our own desires. We end up in desperate need for a supplement to our own unsatisfactory selves through one who is able to meet our deepest needs.

And this is why Jesus keeps bringing our attention back to him alone. They are to “strive” (which may be a better translation in that verse for ἐργάζομαι) for the bread that the *Son of Man* will give. He alone, apart from them, is the one who can give imperishable bread to make them imperishable. He alone is qualified. This makes them all considerably uncomfortable, but Jesus’ controversial point is that eternal life and eternal satisfaction is all about him.

And why is he qualified? “Because upon him God the Father has placed his seal.” The Creator of the world has commissioned the Son of Man, sent him in fact into the world, bearing the seal of his authority. Here we can hear the echo of the words of his Father’s anointing, pouring upon him the seal of the Holy Spirit in his Baptism, “You are my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22), echoed and amplified at his Transfiguration, “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased: listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5).

This Son of Man has authority to give eternal life, as Jesus later says in prayer to his Father, “you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (John 17:2). In fact, “just as the Father has life in himself, so he granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26), and now he can graciously pour out that life by the power of his own hand. He as a man endured many things on our behalf: pain, torture, suffering, mockery, shame, and death; yet, because of his piety and obedience to God on our behalf, “he was heard, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9) precisely because he was granted “the power of an indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16) when he himself was raised from the dead.

So, I ask you today: who has promised you the bread of life, giving you eternal life forever? It is he whom death itself could not hold down, who now “has the keys of death and hell” (Revelation 1:18), who has had victory over all his foes. On him the Father has put his seal, him the Father has sent into the world to give life to the world. And what, O beloved of the Lord, does he demand that you do to

receive the bread of God and heaven and life? Believe in Jesus. Come to Jesus. True and total satisfaction is given at his hands, if you will only receive it.

And he will satisfy. I remember once, now six years ago, I was on a bus in the middle of Ecuador, surrounded by total strangers. I was coming from Perú, where I had just finished a yearlong period of volunteer service by accidentally incinerating my bedroom, along with my money, debit card, and eyeglasses. I was practically broke having just spent my last monies budgeted for food on a now empty bag of bread and bottle of juice. I was exhausted, tired, confused, and oh so hungry. When the bus stopped for us to buy dinner, I simply sat outside, got out my Bible, and began reading Isaiah.

But after just a few minutes a large man came up, told me that God had told him that he needed to buy me a large order of *seco de gallina*, and would not take “no” for an answer. As we talked, that is to say, as he talked and I gobbled down the food, I heard the voice of Christ, telling me again that he could drop food out of heaven, give hope out of nowhere, and he could satisfy every need that I had and have and could have. For this he was born. For this he died. And for this he was raised.

Beloved in the Lord, I beg you today to come to him, be it the first or the last time, and receive from his hand through faith and trust what he freely has to offer as a gift to sinners. Present him with yourself, and watch him come through for you!

3. Jesus is the Gift.

Now, we can see that Jesus is able to satisfy fully next because *he is the bread of life*. Not only does he give what he promises, he is the gift that he gives. He is that food that God has sent down from heaven to give life to the world. He is that which enters into our very being, into our souls, into our bodies, and gives us that immortality which fulfills our deepest longings precisely because we have become one with him. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Let me back up a bit. When the crowd hears Jesus tell them all that he can grant them bread from heaven and eternal life, but that it all centers around him, they suddenly turn around and demand from him a sign: what demonstrates without doubt his credentials to be the kind of pivotal person that he claims to be? Never mind the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, never mind walking on water, never mind their insistence on making him a king the day before. They now demand a sign, one like that which Moses did, “giving them bread from heaven to eat.”

It makes sense for wounded people to be suspicious of the hypocrites, charlatans, windbags who claim to be someone but who do not have the power to back in up. It is thus safer to sit in the spectator’s chair, the judge’s bench, and evaluate the contestants one by one as they fail to meet our expectations. And this is especially compelling when it comes to things divine: don’t let them take you in! Only be convinced if convenient. Or so we tell ourselves.

But Jesus turns silly pretensions, theirs and ours, on their heads. He quickly corrects the crowd's error: it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven, but rather God alone, apart from Moses' mediation, poured down for them the bread from heaven. But this same God, incredibly enough, is again giving now the *true* bread from heaven. And while that former bread could sustain them for a day in their wilderness trek, this bread will sustain them forever.

In other words, God was giving evidence of his faithfulness and goodness all the while they sit in judgment over him? Yet God still shows love, grace and goodness, and sends them the bread "that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." And what is their (obvious) response? "Give us this bread all the time!"

Here, Jesus drops the bombshell: "I am the Bread of Life." God in love sent his own Son to be the Bread of the world, to give light where there was darkness, abundance where there was scarcity, life where there was death. And now with the food-like quality of the Son of God in view, two things become very important.

First, food, in order to nourish, must surrender itself and die. After all, an orange must be pulled apart, bitten into, torn apart, and crushed up if it is to be of any use as food. Food by necessity surrenders its existence to give life. And this, beloved, is precisely what the Lord Jesus did: having taken our human nature upon himself, he was crushed for our iniquities and offered himself up to God on our behalf so that we could be satisfied even as God was in that moment satisfied. He died in order that we might live. In his taking the form of a servant and being crushed by the jaws of death, he became our all-sufficient bread: the Bread of Life.

But second, food, when it dies to itself, becomes a part of us, and we of it. "You are what you eat," as the old saying goes, and Christ even now offers us exactly that. He proposes that he become one with us and we with him. Eating is by far the most intimate connection we have with anything: what we consume gives us life by entering us and becoming a permanent part of us. And Christ, having loved us to the end, offers us full union, a Holy Communion with him here and now as he becomes bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, united in holy covenant with him until the Day dawns and we are seated together at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. He is, without a doubt, the bread of heaven that gives life to the world by being God's unreserved gift to the world.

And so Jesus bids us come: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). There is no bit of himself that he holds back as the Bread of Life (though we may disdain the crusts), nor is there any part of us which he will not claim for his own, but he boldly gives us his life just as his own Father gives him to a world that has hated him despite his infinite love for that very world.

What holds you back? Can you yet believe his promise to be untrue? "The one who comes to me will by no means go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never go thirsty." Come, believe, and entrust yourself to the one who can slake the most desperate longings of your soul.

4. Conclusion.

It may seem odd to you that we call the Lord Jesus both Giver and Gift. Does that even make sense? In fact, it does. It is what we call Love. When we truly love someone we give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to that person, a gesture of excess that takes us outside of ourselves and bestows us upon another who is unique like each of us is. This, beloved in the Lord, is what Christ has done. As St. Paul writes, “I now live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This kind of love blows me away.

But so often we have tasted so little love in our lives, from our parents, from our peers, from our lovers, from that very Church in which this love *must* in some way abide. How can we believe a love that we just cannot see?

Well, we may not see it as yet, face to face. We may be confronted with that dark glass of this less-than-lovely present life. But you may still taste it, and know it: know that such love is real when he says to you (to *you*, beloved!) “This is my Body, given for you: do this in remembrance of me.” Know that this bread that is broken is become for you the Bread of Heaven, this cup that is shared is become for you the Cup of Salvation.

But now I am treading on mysteries too high and too holy for casual reflection at the end of a sermon, and I would rather turn to praise, awe, and wonder instead. Let us together with one voice worship him, Son of God and Son of Man, Lord of life and death and life eternal, King of the nations, Giver of grace, Lover of souls, Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate and Crucified and Glorified One. To him be praise and glory, dominion and honor, now and forever. Amen.

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