

John 6:51-58

Bethlehem, the city of Jesus' birth, was rightly named. Its name means "House of Bread." Hans Christian Anderson may have developed his fables of houses made from gingerbread, but the story of Jesus Christ is no fable. He who was born of a virgin in the House of Bread, in our text refers to Himself as the living Bread which came down out of heaven. Today, again, this Bread is set on the Table before you, and you eat of this Bread in two ways—you eat with your ears, and you eat with your mouth. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life," says Jesus. You eat His flesh and blood sacramentally at His Table, and you eat Him spiritually when His words of life are received in a heart of faith.

So we could say, could we not, that we are here this morning to eat? Now certainly most of us already ate breakfast. I would imagine that we are planning on eating again when we get home. Eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner, however, is not unique to Christians. Everyone eats. The difference between you and everyone else is that you eat between meals. Between Sunday breakfast and Sunday lunch you eat the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. You eat, as He says, the living Bread.

And that makes you who you are. "You are what you eat." We've all heard this expression. You, dear Christian, are a child of God having the gift of eternal life because you eat the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ.

Everyone eats. We know this because to eat is to live. Some people may live to eat, but the truth is that we eat so that we may live. To stop eating is to die. That's why hunger strikes always make national news. A person who refuses to eat because he is protesting something or other is putting his life at risk. Hunger strikes are big news, but when people, even baptized Christians, stop eating the Bread of Life, it hardly causes a stir. A news crew will make its way to Johnny's door if he stops eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but when Johnny stops going to church to eat the living Bread no one cares.

At least no one outside the church cares. Christians do care. Christians eat the living Bread regularly even as they encourage each other to keep eating that Bread—because we know that to stop eating is to die. We do not doubt what Jesus says. When He says in our text, "Unless you eat (Me), you have no life in you," we believe Him. A hunger strike out there can result in death to the body, but a hunger strike within the church can result in separation from Jesus Christ—the death of body and soul.

So why do we tempt God? We eagerly devour breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but how often don't we turn up our nose at His Sacred Meal? We rarely neglect to receive our daily bread, but when it comes to the living Bread for us, we often display a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude. And even when we take it we're awfully picky, taking only what we want—listening only to those words we want to hear. We seem to have a lot of trouble with receiving the living Bread.

Maybe if it was something other than "bread" all the time. I mean...would you be drawn to the dinner table if the only thing on your plate was a slice of bread? Bread doesn't make us say, "Wow!" Maybe a steak with potatoes, and a salad—but bread? When Jesus calls Himself the living Bread He is not trying to draw you to come to His Table and eat because

He is so enticing to your appetite. “Wow! Bread! Let’s go and eat!” That’s not going to happen. Little children aren’t going to ask Mom, “Can I have bread with dinner?” And those same children are not going to ask Dad, “Can you take me to church today?” People don’t get all that excited over bread, and we also don’t get all that excited over coming to church—which is why parents need to make it a regular habit with their children.

Now if mom served Hostess cupcakes for dinner then the kids would eagerly come to the table—but that’s not what they need. And so with us. Jesus is not the “cupcake” of life; He is the Bread of Life. And therefore, hearing His words week after week may not be as fun as eating a cupcake, but His words are eternal life, and they give life to you, and they are what you need.

Let the “cupcake churches” grow as fast as they want to. That’s not our concern here. We serve Bread here. But it’s Bread for your eternal soul. It’s “living” Bread, and it’s, as Jesus says, “real food and real drink.” When you are tempted to stay away from this living Bread, put your hand over your heart...if it’s beating then realize that you are a sinner, and you will die in your sins unless you eat Jesus Christ. For He alone, not anything else that you eat—He alone is the Bread which gives you life.

When Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life it is good that we consider what this means for us. Bread—food of all types and varieties is interesting stuff. Do you realize that food is for us and never vice-versa? Food doesn’t sit on your plate and think, “Okay, what are you going to do for me?” Food is food. This means that food is to be eaten. It is for us, not us for it. It is to nourish us. Food doesn’t need us—we need food.

Jesus’ flesh and blood are real food for you. This means that you are not here for Him, but He is here for you. Jesus never thinks, “Okay, Christian, just what are you going to do for Me?” Jesus is true food, and so He is here for one reason—to be eaten. He is here in Word and Sacrament for you. He doesn’t need you, but you need Him. And He gives you exactly what you need. He forgives you. For all the times when you’ve been on a hunger strike against Him, He forgives you. He rejoices that you are here today, and He is here to pardon your sin. For all the times when you have taken Him for granted and turned away from His Sacred Meal—putting daily bread ahead of the living Bread—He forgives you. He is not angry with you. He loves you and pardons your iniquity.

At His Table He gives you His flesh to eat. The very flesh which was bruised, beaten, and nailed to a cross—that flesh He gives to you in the bread of Communion—because there is life in His flesh...life for you...the life He won for you by His sufferings, death, and resurrection. At His Table He gives His blood to you. The very blood which was spilled on a cross—that blood He gives to you in the wine of Communion—because through His blood there is peace with God. You can come to His Altar, receive Jesus’ flesh and blood, and depart to your homes in peace, for Jesus shed His blood for you. Your Heavenly Father has nothing against you—no grudges, no punishment, no anger. He is at peace with each one of you. Even if you have doubts; even if you are angry at Him, He is at peace with you because Jesus died for you. You are forgiven.

No cupcake can give you all this. You have heaven, now, in Jesus Christ. Eternal life is yours. It’s all in the Bread—that living Bread which is here for you. Amen.

