

Not Only a Symbol

Jesus is making a very clear point at the end of this first reading. He's making a contrast between the miraculous manna in the desert that we heard referred to by Moses in the first reading. Although that manna was miraculous and sustained them, He's making the point that that manna didn't save them. They still died.

But He's making the point that the more miraculous manna, which is the Holy Eucharist, is so powerful that it actually gives us eternal life.

What we celebrate today is a symbol, but is not only a symbol.

To understand the text as it's going, you have to understand the Greek a little bit to get at the emphasis that comes across in today's Gospel.

Jesus is using a term in Greek throughout this chapter six, a word that means to eat in a regular way: *phagein*. But then, right after the leaders quarrel and say, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Jesus is given the opportunity to make the teaching more clear if what He means is symbolism.

But instead of doing that, He doubles down.

Instead of continuing to use *phagein*, which means to eat in the normal sense, in verse 56 He changes the verb. He moves from using the word *phagein*, which means to eat in an ordinary sense, to the verb *trōgein*, which has a more concrete sense: to chew or gnaw.

If the Eucharist that we're talking about is symbolic, Jesus does not make that clearer. He doubles down and, in fact, says the opposite.

Now, this may not mean a lot to you, so you have to understand the context here.

Throughout these long discourses in John—the woman at the well, the man born blind, the lame man—Jesus often is speaking symbolically and will say some really puzzling things like, "One has to be born again." And Nicodemus says, "How can I go back into my mother's womb to be born again?" Then Jesus clarifies that He's being symbolic.

So, Jesus making a hard point and then talking about symbolism happens throughout the Gospel of John. Not here.

This is a very unique take, where Jesus, when given the opportunity and given the confusion to render the meaning symbolic, doubles down and clarifies—again, you have to know the Greek to see it—that what we celebrate here is not merely symbolic. It is truly His flesh and His blood.

It makes sense, because something symbolic would be less amazing than the manna from heaven. Something symbolic is not miraculous at all.

So, His line at the end of the Gospel today would be puzzling, because if what we did here were just a symbol, if this were not actually Christ's flesh and blood in sacramental forms, what we're doing would be less miraculous than the manna in the desert.

The Majesty of the Real Presence

In Christ's teaching, and one of the reasons that this feast of Corpus Christi was instituted, was to get at the marvelous majesty of the Real Presence of the Eucharist.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, took flesh in time. He sacrificed Himself on the Cross in time, and His blood poured out for our forgiveness and healing in time.

He has left Himself to us in sacramental form in the Eucharist.

When we celebrate this Eucharist each and every week, we become perfectly present sacramentally to that eternal, one-time sacrifice on the Cross. And as we are made present sacramentally to this one moment in which we were saved, we also become present to His resurrected flesh, which is the flesh that we actually receive in Holy Communion.

It is His resurrected flesh that we receive, and that is able to give us life, life in abundance, and eternal life.

It is this perfect self-offering that sets us free, heals us, and gives us new life. And it is truly His flesh and His blood that we receive in the Eucharist.

Jesus gives Himself completely to you in the Eucharist.

And so, my question for us is: what do we give Him in return?

And how do we prepare ourselves to celebrate this Eucharist each Sunday so that it doesn't simply become this routine thing that I do each week, these motions I walk through every week?

Offering Ourselves Back

Here's the takeaway.

Our Archbishop, as you probably know if you received the Northwest Catholic, is focusing our archdiocese this year on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In this devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Archbishop is asking us, as much as possible, to pray daily what is called the Catholic Morning Offering. On your exit today, there are a bunch of these prayer cards on the table with the Morning Offering.

A daily Morning Offering, made intentionally, of offering ourselves back to the Lord who gives Himself so completely to us, is a very good way to ground ourselves in offering our prayers, joys, works, and sufferings back to the Lord so that He may transform us.

Just as this regular bread and wine is brought forward, transformed, and given back to us as His Body and Blood, so also when we offer ourselves to the Lord, He offers us back ourselves transformed.

So dear friends, as we celebrate the Eucharist today, let us be mindful of what we are doing, and let us have great gratitude at this great gift that He gives to us.

Praise be Jesus Christ.