

The Bread of Life

John 6

What We Found

At Passover, on a Galilean hillside, Jesus took five barley loaves, gave thanks, *eucharistēsas*, and fed five thousand, with twelve baskets of fragments gathered so that nothing would be lost. Elisha once fed a hundred with twenty loaves; the shadow was left far behind: fifty times the crowd on a quarter of the loaves. That night the disciples saw footprints where Scripture says only God walks, on the sea, and heard him say, It is I; do not be afraid, the *egō eimi* with the divine I AM sounding beneath it.

Then the discourse, in two movements. In the first, I am the bread of life means exactly what it says at verse 35: coming to him is the eating, believing is the drinking, and we granted that fully. But at verse 51 the discourse turns: the bread which I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world. The crowd took him literally and asked how, and here, alone among the misunderstandings we tracked, Jesus answered a literal reading not with correction but with escalation: he gave his solemn double Amen, he added blood, and the verb itself shifted to the concrete *trōgein*, to gnaw, four times. We read Leviticus 17 and understood why blood was the most offensive word possible, and why its reason, the life is in the blood, is the whole point of the gift. Many of his own disciples left over this teaching, the Gospels' great doctrinal walkout, and he did not call after them that it was a metaphor. He asked the Twelve: will you also go away? And Peter gave the answer that faith has been giving ever since, not I understand, but: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans 7 (c. 107 AD)

Writing under guard on the road to martyrdom, within living memory of this Gospel's publication, Ignatius identifies the heretics of his day by one test: they abstain from the Eucharist, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins. The realist reading of John 6 is not a later invention; it is the faith of the generation that knew the apostles, held at the cost of blood.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogical Catecheses

Teaching the newly baptized in Jerusalem itself, Cyril instructs them: do not regard them as bare bread and wine, for by the Master's own declaration they are the Body and Blood of Christ. Though the senses suggest otherwise, let faith make you firm; judge not by taste, but be fully assured by faith.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas, Adoro te devote

The Church's greatest mind wrote her humblest Eucharistic hymn: sight, touch, and taste are all deceived in judging you, but hearing alone is safely believed; I believe whatever the Son of God has said, and nothing is truer than this word of Truth. The whole act of Eucharistic faith rests where

Peter rested at Capernaum: on the sheer reliability of the one speaking.

Live It This Week

- **Receive like it is true.** This Sunday, prepare on purpose: keep the Communion fast, arrive early enough to pray, and at the elevation make Aquinas's act of faith your own: I believe whatever the Son of God has said. Then walk to the altar as if John 6 were true, because it is.
- **Fifteen minutes with the answer.** Make one visit to the tabernacle or adoration this week, fifteen minutes, no agenda. Bring only Peter's sentence: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Say it once and stay.
- **Examine before you approach.** The Church asks us to examine ourselves before receiving (CCC 1385). Take ten honest minutes this week; if the examination turns up something serious, the same Lord who feeds at one altar forgives in the confessional, and the second is the road back to the first.

Memory Verse

John 6:68 (RSV2CE)

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Before Next Session

Read John 7 and 8, two chapters this time; read them in one sitting if you can, because they happen at a single feast. Session 8: Before Abraham Was, I AM. Keep every tally going, and keep your guess sealed; it is worth more every week.

Catechism References

CCC 1324, 1336, 1374, 1385, 1406.