

Unless You Eat

John 6:52-71; John 2:19-21; John 3:3-5

What We Found

The crowd asked the question: How can this man give us his flesh to eat? And Jesus answered by raising every stake: truly, truly, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. From verse 54 the verb itself hardens, from eating to chewing, at exactly the point where a metaphor would have been explained. We checked John's habit elsewhere: Nicodemus corrected, the temple saying corrected, literal misunderstandings always rescued. Here, uniquely: no rescue, only escalation.

We built the case against the realistic reading as strongly as we could: verse 63, St. Augustine's believe and you have eaten, the door and the vine, the horror of blood; and its strongest form, that eating means feeding on Christ by faith, a real spiritual communion rather than a bare figure. Then we pressed it against the text. Verse 63 says the flesh, not my flesh, and spirit never means symbolic in Scripture. St. Augustine also wrote that no one eats that flesh without first adoring it. No one ever walked out over the door or the vine. And if eating had meant only believing, one sentence of explanation would have kept the crowd; instead he let them go. Then verse 66: many disciples drew back, the only doctrinal desertion in the Gospels, and he let them go. And Peter: Lord, to whom shall we go?

Then we opened the envelopes. Eleven weeks ago, each of us predicted in writing that somewhere a teaching would empty the room and Jesus would not soften it. Scripture supplied the scene, and our own sealed handwriting testified that the hardness of John 6 was never invented by anyone; it is native to the text. One thing remains open: the giving is still future tense, the bread which I shall give. Next week, an upper room.

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, c. 107 AD

St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, whom ancient tradition places among the disciples of the apostle John, wrote on his way to martyrdom that certain heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins. Within living memory of John's Gospel, in a church whose bishop, St. Polycarp, was remembered as John's own student, the realistic reading was not one option among several; it was the test of communion.

St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on the Gospel of John, 4th century

St. John Chrysostom preached on this chapter that Christ mingled himself with us so that we might become one body with him, not by love only but in very fact. How many say, I wish I could see his face, his form, his sandals: behold, he says, you see him, you touch him, you eat him. He gives

himself not to be looked at merely, but to be our food.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Mystagogical Catecheses, 4th century

St. Cyril taught the newly baptized not to judge the matter by taste, but to hold with full assurance what faith affirms. Though sense suggests one thing, he said, let faith make you firm; judge not by the palate but by the Lord's own declaration, for he cannot lie. The senses report the surface; the word of Christ reports the reality.

Live It This Week

1. Memorize Peter's confession this week and pray it once a day, especially anywhere faith feels harder than usual: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
2. Reread John 6 start to finish in one sitting, now knowing all of it, and mark the verse that lands hardest on you personally. Bring the verse next week.
3. Think of one person you know who finds this teaching impossible. Do not argue with them this week; pray for them by name, daily, with Peter's words.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68

Before Next Session

Read Luke 22:7-20 slowly, twice. Then read Psalm 116, and know this about it: Psalm 116 belongs to the Hallel, the set of psalms Israel sang at the Passover meal. Bring both readings in your bones.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1336; 1381