

Contexts

John's Gospel

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

**1:1-18: Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

**1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs:** the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

**13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory:** To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

**21:1-25: Epilogue:** Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)

John 6:24-35 – things to notice

- Last Sunday's Gospel episode ended with Jesus escaping from the crowd. This Sunday's episode begins with the crowds pursuing Jesus and the disciples. Verses 16-23 about Jesus walking on the water and introducing the episode we will read this Sunday are omitted (to maintain the 'Bread of Life' connection).
- Essentially, what has happened is this: Jesus has disappeared. The disciples get into the boat, heading for Capernaum. The storm blows up. They see Jesus walking on the water. They intend to take Jesus into the boat, but miraculously, the boat reaches the shore at Capernaum immediately. Meanwhile, boats from Tiberius arrives at the place where the bread was eaten and the people figure out that Jesus has not gone to Tiberius, so they set out for Capernaum to look for him in the boats from Tiberius.
- 'When did you come here' – Jesus does not answer the question.
- Jesus responds that the crowd is looking for him because they 'had all the bread you wanted to eat', and not because they understood the sign. Signs in John's Gospel are invitations to faith in Jesus. The crowd hasn't understood what the feeding was all about, so John has Jesus setting out to teach them to understand.
- 'Do not work for the food that cannot last... work for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.' This is not primarily about the bread of the Eucharist, but about Jesus being God's word of revelation (the bread of life).
- 'The work that God wants' - working for this food means to *believe* in the one God has sent: Jesus himself. Believing in Jesus is about being in relationship with him so that he can feed and sustain us.
- The crowd asks for a sign to prove that they should believe in Jesus. After all, they say, Moses gave our ancestors bread to eat in the desert; what will you do? Their request underlines their failure to really see the sign that they had already been given. Jesus reformulates their quote from scripture: It is God (not Moses) who gives (not gave) the true bread from heaven (not like the flaky manna in the desert), the bread of God which gives life to the world. In that case, they say, give us that bread always.

- Jesus replies: I am the bread of life, those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never thirst. Jesus himself is the Father's gift. Jesus is real food for the hunger and thirsts of the human heart. Jesus is nourishment for this life and for the next. Faith in Jesus as the Bread from God links the life we live now and the life to come.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The first reading recalls the feeding of the Israelites with manna and quail in the desert. The Church's purpose in choosing this reading is both because that particular episode is mentioned in the Gospel today, and also because it is another example of God feeding his people – God as the source of nourishment for human beings.

Reflection

Our journey through Chapter 6 of St John's Gospel continues. Two weeks ago, Jesus showed himself the true shepherd-king, feeding the inner hunger of the people for the Word of God. Last week, Jesus fed the physical hunger of a great multitude with a simple meal of bread and fish. The people, impressed by what they saw, wanted to make him their warrior-king, one who would lead them in a revolt against the occupying Romans and satisfy their every desire. Jesus escaped into the hills.

This Sunday, the crowd has caught up with Jesus. He accuses them of looking for him only because he gave them all the bread they wanted to eat, not because they had understood that the bread was a sign of the real food Jesus was offering. Jesus urges them to work for 'food that endures to eternal life', the food that he himself is offering them: his word of revelation. Working for this food means to believe in the one God has sent: Jesus himself.

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At mass we are fed by the living Word of God in the scriptures, hymns, prayers and responses we pray and sing together. The Word prepares us to receive the Sacrament of Communion. Jesus' teaching this week is preparing the crowd for his invitation for them to feast on his body and blood.

To be able to be nourished by Jesus one must believe (have faith) in him. This implies (again) a personal relationship with Jesus. It is not about believing in transubstantiation (the change of bread and wine into his Body and Blood). Our relationships feed and sustain us as human beings. They are born of the food of love, compassion and forgiveness. Being in a relationship is to be drawn into communion with another person.

We always draw life in some sense from those we love and those who love us. It is the same with Jesus. In order to draw life from him, to be fed by him, we have to be in love with him.

