

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.

**Chapter 6** – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

**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)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 6:41-51 – things to notice

- Follows (almost) immediately from last Sunday's Gospel reading
- The omission of verses 36-40 allow continuity between Jesus' claim to be the bread of life (last Sunday) and the crowd's reaction (this Sunday)
- Remember that in John's Gospel the term 'the Jews' refers not to the whole people but only to the Jewish authorities opposed to the Christian way.
- The Gospel begins with a dispute about Jesus' origins: he says he has come down from heaven, but we know his father and mother (that is, where he has come from).
- Jesus tells them to stop murmuring (complaining, grumbling) to each other. Note the parallel with the people in the desert murmuring against Moses and against God – a sign of their unbelief).
- Note the way the following verses build upon each other:
  - No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father – God is responsible for the faith of those who believe; faith is God's doing (work), has its origin in God.
  - I will raise him up on the last day – faith in Jesus and eternal life are linked, replacing faith in the Law of Moses and eternal life. Jesus is the agent of resurrection.
  - They will all be taught by God (through Jesus). One cannot be taught by God except through hearing from and believing in Jesus.
  - To hear the teaching of the Father (from Jesus) and learn from it is to come to me.
  - The one who comes from God (Jesus) has seen the Father.
  - Those who believe (in Jesus) have eternal life. Note: the present tense: have, not will have.
  - I am the bread of life.
  - This is the bread come down from heaven so that a person may eat it and not die – in contrast to the manna in the desert.

- I am the living bread come down from heaven. Note: not only the 'bread of life' but the 'living' bread.
- Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever – no longer depending on perishable food and drink for life.
- This bread is my flesh given for the life of the world. This is the first mention of 'flesh' in the Bread of Life passages.
- So this last verse adds the idea that Jesus' flesh is to be given up on the altar of the cross for the life of the world and given in prophetic sign at the Last Supper to the idea that Jesus' word and wisdom (divine teaching) will feed to hungers of the human heart so that those called to faith will not hunger nor thirst. Note that there is no Last Supper in John's Gospel. It seems that the meaning of the Last Supper has been incorporated in these Bread of Life passages.

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

The first reading is from the First Book of the Kings. It is the story of the prophet Elijah being fed 'heavenly food' which enables him to undertake a long journey in the wilderness. It is a journey to meet God.

Taken together with today's Gospel, we have the idea that our journey to meet God can only be sustained by the living bread (food) of Jesus – a food which can only be consumed when one is in intimate relationship with Jesus. A food which is present in the teaching and wisdom of Jesus and given on the altar of the Cross, so that his resurrection might be ours as well.

#### Reflection

At the end of last week's Gospel, Jesus said: *I am the bread of life, those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never thirst.* In other words, Jesus feeds us with the living bread of God's word, which is himself. But this word can only be received by those who believe, that is, who are in relationship with Jesus. The first step is to recognise where Jesus comes from (God).

In a great example of unbelief the Jewish authorities reject Jesus at the beginning of this week's Gospel because they know where he comes from and therefore he cannot be 'from heaven'. Once again they are unable to read the face of God in Jesus. They think they know exactly who Jesus is - we know his father and mother. And their focus remains firmly fixed on the bread they ate, not the person who provided it.

Jesus tells them to stop complaining and insists that only those drawn by God can believe in him. Jesus insists again that God draws people to belief in him. One cannot be taught by God apart from hearing and believing the word of Jesus. And those who believe have eternal life.

Jesus again insists that he is the Bread of Life. Referring to his earlier conversation with the crowd in last week's Gospel, Jesus says that those who ate the manna in the desert are dead; and those who eat the bread of life he is offering will live. Life comes from being in relationship (in communion) with Jesus.

The Gospel concludes with Jesus once again stating that he is indeed the living bread which has come down from heaven. Those who eat this bread will live for ever. The bread that Jesus will give is his own flesh offered on the altar of the cross for the life of the world and given in prophetic sign at the Last Supper.

If we enter into communion with Jesus we can become the living bread through whom God continues to feed his people with wisdom, compassion, hope, forgiveness and love.