

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's frequent use of the crowd or the Jews who question or misunderstand in order to provoke the replies he puts on the lips of Jesus which unfold the teaching.

John 6:51-58 – things to notice

- Begins by repeating the last few verses from last Sunday's Gospel reading.
- Notice that Jesus is addressing the 'crowd' at the beginning of this Gospel and **then** replies to 'the Jews' objection in verse 52.
- Remember that in John's Gospel the term 'the Jews' refers not to the whole people but to the Jewish authorities opposed to the Christian way.
- Again, the 'Jews' raise an objection: How can this man give us his flesh to eat?
- Jesus replies. Note the way the verses build upon each other:
  - Continuing the idea of Jesus' flesh and blood
  - If you don't eat and drink you will not have life
  - If you eat and drink you will have eternal life
  - Flesh is real (true) food; blood is real (true) drink
  - He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him - Through eating and drinking we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us – eating and drinking Jesus is the source of communion with Jesus. Note the graphic nature of the language which is unfortunately lost in this translation. The verb used here means 'to chew' on the flesh of Jesus. Here again is the insistence on intimate relationship with Jesus.
  - Just as I draw life from the father, so those who eat and drink draw life from me – eating and drinking Jesus is the source of communion with Jesus *and the father*. Intimate relationship with Jesus is intimate relationship with God.
  - Restating that the bread which has come down from heaven is not what the ancestors who are dead ate; anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.
  - The very self and life of Jesus is the bread come down from heaven.
  - Again, NOT like the manna in the desert which did not prevent death, this bread gives eternal life because through it one lives (shares in, has communion with) the very life of God.

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

The first reading this weekend tells how Wisdom has built a house and invited the foolish (those who are not yet wise) to feast on the food of her teaching. Those who eat the bread and drink the wine of Wisdom perceive God's saving action and understand the life to which they are called as God's own people.

This first reading provides us with an introduction to listening to the words of the Gospel. Jesus is the living wisdom of God. Like Wisdom in the first reading, Jesus also invites us to feed on him so that we, too, may become wise in the ways of God, perceive God's saving action in him, become the people of God and have life, not only now, but for ever.

Reflection – Communion with Jesus and one another

In the Gospel, the dialogue between Jesus and the people continues. This time they are arguing about how Jesus could possibly give them his flesh to eat. Jesus insists that if they don't eat it they will not have life in them and they will not have eternal life.

Underlining the message by talking about his flesh being real food and his blood being real drink immediately connects this teaching of Jesus to the Eucharistic celebration. Some of these verses may well have been used by the Christians in John's time during their liturgy. But this reading is not only about the Eucharistic celebration, but also about what that celebration symbolises – the very life of God made present and visible in the person of Jesus and received in the sacramental signs of Bread and Wine. It is a celebration of being in communion with Jesus and the Father. Following the teaching of Jesus, it is also a celebration of being in communion with one another.

Intimate relationship (being in communion) with Jesus the 'bread of life', is the way in which Jesus feeds his people with his very self - his own flesh and blood – everything that he is. Food sustains and supports life and growth. To eat Jesus is to be caught up in the communion of life he shares with the Father and to feed on the very life of God. It is how we are sustained in and grow in our relationship with God. Eternal life is part of sharing the life of God.