

Contexts

John's Gospel

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

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!

- 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 6:60-69 – things to notice

- Follows almost immediately from last Sunday's Gospel reading
- 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.
- Note the way the verses build upon each other:
 - The complaint that begins this section comes not from Jews but from Jesus' followers.
 - This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it? That is: Jesus saying he is the bread of life, come down from heaven; that no one truly lives unless they eat and drink him; that Jesus will raise them up on the last day;
 - If you think what I have said is unacceptable, how will you react when you see the (even greater thing of the) Son of Man ascending to heaven?
 - The spirit gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer - a reference back to an earlier saying about what comes from flesh and what comes from the Spirit. Only the person born of the Spirit will be capable of believing the words of Jesus.
 - My words are spirit and life, but some of you don't believe.
 - No one can come to me unless the father allows him.
 - Many abandon Jesus – it's all too much. This is a reference to the experience of desertion and betrayal in the Johannine community.
 - Jesus then addresses the inner circle – the twelve – will they also leave him?
 - Peter makes the great confession of faith – 'Lord to whom should we go? You have the message of eternal life and we believe because we know you are the Holy One of God, and we believe. Note the huge contrast between Peter's confession of faith and the lack of faith on the part of the Jews and Jesus' own disciples earlier in these passages.

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

The affirmation of faith in God by the people in the first reading from the Old Testament book of Joshua is echoed by Peter's affirmation of faith in Jesus in the Gospel. Joshua

says: It's decision time. Who will be your God? The people answer: We remember what God has done for us. We have no intention of deserting the Lord our God - unlike some of the followers of Jesus in the Gospel.

Our excursion into the 'Bread of Life' passages of Chapter 6 of Saint John's Gospel comes to an end today.

Over the last four Sundays, St John has taken us on a journey of discovering Jesus as the living Word of God who nourishes and strengthens us on our journey; as the living bread who gives his very self (flesh and blood) for the life of the world; and, today, as the bread of faith. Those who share the bread of faith are those who have chosen to believe in Jesus and follow him.

Only by drawing life from Jesus can one be drawn into the life of God. We feed on Jesus so that he becomes part of us and his life continues to grow in us and our life becomes caught up in his. That life draws us into communion with the life of God. We become sharers in that life, our awareness of which is nourished and strengthened as we eat and drink.

This meditation from John is about how Jesus is still present and a source of faith and nourishment in the life of the post-resurrection Christian community. The 'real presence' of Jesus lives on in the community. That presence is perceived by faith and received as living Word, food and drink, nourishing disciples in their journey to be the 'real presence' of Jesus in the world, the everlasting sign of God's love for all.

At Eucharist we gather in communion with each other, with Jesus the Word, with Jesus the Bread and Wine. We are doing in a sacramental way what Jesus is doing in a real way within us. The Eucharist is teaching us how to live our lives as Christian disciples: how to be in communion with God and each other through our communion with Jesus.

What we physically eat and drink become us. Food changes and transforms cells, blood, muscle, tissue and organs. The purpose of Christian life is for us to become Christ. Having faith, being nourished by him changes and transforms us into his body and blood for the life of the world. We become the real presence of Jesus in the world today.

Connections to the Eucharist

The words of the Gospels of these five Sundays parallel our experience of celebrating the Eucharist. There are three 'holy communions' at mass, not one. There is the communion of believers, as the people of Christ gather to celebrate the Eucharist; the communion of the Word when we listen together to the Scriptures; and the communion of the Bread and Wine when we eat and drink together. These communions are holy because, through Christ, God and human beings are in communion with one another and God is at work nourishing, healing, redeeming and forming the face of his Son within us - so that we may be the living presence of Christ in the world today. Feasting on Christ in Word and Sacrament, we too, are called to nourish and strengthen each other on our journey to God.