

Jesus “The Bread of Life” Nourishes Us

There’s a story about a pastor who for his homily, came down off the altar to walk among the smiling faces of several boys and girls who were about to receive the Eucharist while making their first Holy Communion. During his homily, the pastor took great care to discuss the importance of Eucharist in the faith life of Catholics.

“The Bible talks of Holy Communion as being a ‘joyful feast’,” he said. “What does that mean? Well, ‘joyful’ means happy, right? And a feast is a meal. So a ‘joyful feast’ is a happy meal.”

Seeing that he had their attention, the pastor continued.

“And what are the three things we need for a happy meal?”

A little boy excitedly shot up put his hand. “Yes, young man?” the pastor said.

“A hamburger, fries, and a Coke!” the boy proudly exclaimed.

As I reflected this week on the Gospel reading for tomorrow (Sunday, Aug. 12) from John (6:41-51), I couldn’t help but think that the boy’s answer above really wasn’t that far off the mark in terms of how the feeding of our mortal bodies through the Eucharist correlates to our spiritual well-being. This Sunday’s Gospel gives us the third installment of what I call the “Bread Series,” consisting of four Sundays where we hear Jesus speaking to the Jews in John 6 about the bread of life.

We hear the prophetic words of Jesus saying he is the living bread that came down from heaven. Through these words, Jesus was preparing the believers for the Last Supper that would introduce the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in the Holy Catholic Church. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

Unfortunately, just as the Jews weren’t listening to what Jesus was attempting to

reveal to them and fought and argued with him every step of the way, many people today also think with worldly minds when it comes to Jesus and the Eucharist. Some say it's just symbolic, not really Christ fully in the Eucharist (sadly, some Catholics believe this). Others challenge every word and doctrine, missing completely the grace imparted upon those who receive the Eucharist through the Holy Spirit.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC, 1324). Receiving Christ fully in the Eucharist – body, blood soul and divinity – nourishes us, providing spiritual strength for all that we encounter in our daily lives.

With the ongoing and blatant attacks from our society and government against the family and the Church in today's world, the Eucharist is the glue that keeps families together. We need to be hungry to receive our Lord and then thankful and peaceful once we do, for to receive Christ in the Eucharist is to receive the very essence of him through faith.

As individual families and as the family of Catholics bound in faith and love by the Eucharist, let us hungrily receive our Lord with grateful and contrite hearts. He is the healer and redeemer who nourishes our bodies and spirits with the bread of life.