

Sermon during Matins on St. John's gospel 6:47-58

The grace of our Lord IX, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all +

Our Lord Jesus Christ says: "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." (Joh 6:47-58 NIV)

Let us pray: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may receive with thanksgiving our daily bread and the very bread of life – Your Son IX – that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul in the true and saving faith; through IX Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ + Some have sounded the death knell of believing ages ago. Prematurely they announced the age of reason. Enlightenment all over. African renaissance even. Yet ancient religions are on a come-back, the Spirits of the Fathers rising and our populist "Daily Sun" reports all sorts of crazy beliefs and fanatical ideologies, each one chanting louder than the other the fervent refrain: "Me too – I'm a believer!" (Neil Diamond) Well, I'm grateful it's not in our hymnbook yet.

Our Lord IX doesn't mean this kind of generic belief and more or less enthusiastic conviction. It's not just any fervent faith and burning persuasion that will save you or get you eternal life or into heaven or anywhere close for that matter. It must be the right, salutary and true faith. St. Paul clarifies this, when he points to the efforts of his own people, who were indeed very sincere about religion, serving hard and with passion and ongoing dedication, going about this faith business with

all their strength, heart and mind most pedantically. Yet it was all in vain and blowing against the wind, since it was misguided, wrong and off the mark: “Nearly, but not quite” we heard yesterday.

In Deuteronomy (5th Book of Moses) we hear: *“God humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* (Deu 8:3 NIB)

See, man is created by God and lives only in connection with this source and centre of life. God sustains our life with daily bread and with the essential, vital words from his mouth. This creates, gives and produces true and saving faith, which is but a gift, miracle and fruit of God’s Word, which is the true bread from heaven, which has been preached by his apostles and prophets through the ages and finally at the zenith of time became flesh and dwelt amongst us – born in Bethlehem (Home of the bread and indeed the true bread basket of the world!), grew up in Nazareth, Capernaum, Nain, Jericho and handing out bread in the most unlikely and deserted places, granting and handing out divine abundance that all are fed and nourished, sharing the best wine in Cana that all rejoice in his party of plenty. He eats and drinks with sinners, poor people, outcasts, ill and bedevilled to make those so lost to be found, returned, restored and thus made very much at home once again in the house of the Father. Eventually he comes to the city of David, Jerusalem, the old Zion and outlived temple of God. He washes dirty feet. Sets the table. Then he - the incarnate word, the only begotten Son of the Father, very God of very God conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, flesh of our flesh, red blood pulsing in his veins and heart just like in yours and mine, solemnly says: Behold, take note: “I am the living bread! I the one of the burning bush, who brought you out of Egypt in the night of deliverance– it is still I, even now the same, who shall be this the bread of life, which has come from heaven, the living bread, so whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” This is His invitation to eat and to drink of the living waters flowing from him – come, eat and drink for free from the divine abundance and heavenly goodness to never thirst and to never go hungry again. Come and taste, how friendly your God is. Come and see, the living fountains springing from his inviting hands, from his pierced side and his thorn crowned head. Not just bread and wine, but the very blood and body, the essential being of him, who was and is and shall be: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” Remember the quote from Cwirla.

This food doesn't so much become us, but rather makes us into him – transformation, change, renovation, reformation and revitalization. Making us godly relatives, heirs of heaven, brothers and sisters of Christ, royalty, each one of you true princes and princesses. Our fathers called this the “*pharmakon athanasian*” – medicine against dying, pharmaceuticals for eternal life in and with IX. It's what is the centre of attraction at the Lord's supper. His very body and most precious blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins and giving us life in IX and eternal salvation in, with and through him, who is the true bread that came from heaven. Whoever believes in him, will live forever.

This is a shibboleth of faith - this real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ's body and blood in his sacrament and testament instituted by him on the night he was betrayed. Not just the worthy, but even the unworthy (*manducatio impiorum*) receive it with ever unclean lips and such famished mouths (*manducatio oralis*). From the beginning the protest was voiced: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Too many have turned their back explaining: "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (cf Joh 6:60-66 NIV) This we agree and confess is humanly impossible. For I by my own reason or strength can not believe in IX, my Lord or come to him and eat and drink his supper faithfully and appropriately, but the Holy Spirit has called me and is still calling, inviting and laying out the table before me so that my cup overfloweth: "*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*" (Joh 7:37-38 NIV) With St. Thomas and the Christian church we kneel down and confess: "*My Lord and my God*" – and we eat from hands like ours the true body and from the precious cup of salvation we drink the very blood of our Lord IX being held by his promise that it was given and shed for us for the forgiveness of all our sins as for the sins of the world also. Amen.

"Thy body, giv'n for me, O Saviour, Thy blood which Thou for me didst shed, These are my life and strength forever. By them my hungry soul is fed. With Thee, Lord, I am now united; I live in Thee and Thou in me. Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood be for my soul the highest good! Amen.

The peace of our Lord be with you always + Amen.

Post-Scriptum: Our Confession points out that there is a twofold eating of Christ's flesh. First, there is a spiritual kind of eating, which Christ treats above all in our passage of the gospel of St. John 6[:35–58*]. This occurs in no other way than with the Spirit and faith in the proclamation of and meditation on the gospel, as well as in the Supper. It is in and of itself useful, salutary, and

necessary for all Christians at all times for their salvation. Without this spiritual reception even the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not salutary but also harmful and damning.

This spiritual eating, however, is nothing other than faith—namely, hearkening to, accepting with faith, and applying to ourselves God’s Word, which presents Christ to us as true God and a true human being along with all his benefits (God’s grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life). These he won for us with his flesh, which he gave into death for us, and with his blood, which he poured out for us. Moreover, this faith means relying firmly upon this comfort (that we have a gracious God and eternal salvation for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ) with unshakable assurance and trust, holding on to this assurance in every difficulty and tribulation.

The other kind of eating of Christ’s body is oral or sacramental, when all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine in the Supper receive and partake of the true, essential body and blood of Christ orally. Believers receive it as a certain pledge and assurance that their sins are truly forgiven and that Christ dwells in them with his power. Unbelievers receive it, too, but in their case as judgment and condemnation. As the Words of Institution of Christ expressly state: while at the table during the Supper, he distributed natural bread and wine to his disciples and called them his true body and his true blood. Then he said, “Eat and drink.” Under these circumstances, such a command cannot be understood in any other way but as eating and drinking orally, though certainly not in a crude, fleshly, Capernaïtic manner, but **supernaturally and incomprehensibly**. To that command the Lord Christ afterward added a second command regarding another, spiritual eating, when he later said, **“Do this in remembrance of me,” and thereby demanded faith.**

For this reason, in harmony with these words of Christ’s institution and St. Paul’s explanation, all the ancient Christian teachers teach expressly, with one accord, and with the entire holy Christian church, that the body of Christ is not only received spiritually through faith, which takes place also apart from the sacrament, but also orally, and this not only by believing, godly Christians, but also by the unworthy, unbelieving, false, and evil Christians. (Kolb & Wengert Pg 604)

Before the Sermon hymn 617: “O Lord, we praise thee...”

After the Sermon hymn 619: “Thy Body, given for me, o Saviour...”