

# A Word for Sunday

With Father Albert Shamon



**Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:51-58; (R1) Proverbs 9:1-6; (R2) Ephesians 5:15-20.**

The gospels of the first three Sundays of August, as we have said, are taken from our Lord's discourse on the bread of life given in the synagogue at Capernaum and recorded by John in the sixth chapter of his gospel (verses 24-58).

This coming Sunday's gospel (6:51-58) is the conclusion of our Lord's discourse. This section is very likely a recast of our Lord's words at the Last Supper. John, as you know, omits the institution of the Eucharist in his Last Supper narrative. The probable reason is that he has put it here in the discourse on the bread of life. By doing this, he reflects the structural skeleton of the Mass: Liturgy of the Word (John 6:30-50) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (John 6:51-58). But more importantly, John expresses the twofold presence of Jesus to believers: His presence in the preached word (6:30-50) and His presence in the eucharistic sacrament (6:51-58).

Because this section is so meaty, it might be best if we reflected on it almost verse by verse.

Jesus says, *I myself am the living bread.* A short while before, He had spoken of himself as the bread of life. The terms are synonymous, but "living bread" is more suitable for the sacrament of the Eucharist and "bread of life" for the preached word. "Living bread" tells what the Eucharist is; "bread of life," what truth does.

*If anyone eats this bread he will live forever.* Here, Jesus is telling us that eternal life is not simply the result of believing in Jesus; it comes from feeding on His flesh and drinking His blood.

*The bread I will give is the flesh for the life of the world.* Very likely, these are the actual words of our Lord, used at the Last Supper. They resonate Luke's account: "This is my body which is given for you." The synoptics use "body;" John uses "flesh." John is probably closer to the actual words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "This is my flesh," for there is no Hebrew or Aramaic word for "body" as we understand the term.

*If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.* The Eastern Church takes these words literally. As a result, it gives Holy Communion to infants at baptism.

The reformers in the 16th century argued about whether or not this text demanded Communion under both

forms. The Hebrew idiom "flesh and blood" means "the whole man" — like our expression "me, myself and I." All this text can prove is the necessity of receiving the whole Christ, which happens when Communion is received under either form.

Then John insists on the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Whenever our Lord was misunderstood, He would explain the misunderstanding. For instance, when Nicodemus took the words "begotten from above" to mean physical rebirth, our Lord explained He was talking about a spiritual rebirth "of water and the Spirit." When His apostles mistook His words "Lazarus sleepeth," Jesus corrected the misunderstanding with "Lazarus is dead." But in this instance, when His words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood are taken literally, Jesus not only does not correct Himself, instead He reaffirms what He said more emphatically. First, He changed the Greek word for "eat" (phagein) to the stronger Greek word "feed" (trophein, meaning "to crunch, munch and gnaw"). Then He further insisted on the reality of His presence by the adjective "real" — "real food and real drink."

The synoptics record the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. But John shifts it to this spot, joins it to the discourse on the bread of life. In this way, he clearly explains what the Eucharist does for Christians. The preached word, bread of life, gives life; but the eucharistic sacrament, the living bread, gives communion in the life of God — *I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me.*

Though John insists on the reality of the flesh and blood, he does not go to the other extreme of attributing magical power to Holy Communion and thus equating the Christian sacrament with pagan mystery. He promises life to the man who feeds on His flesh and drinks His blood — but this promise follows the discourse on faith in Jesus (verses 30-50). The entire discourse, therefore, teaches that life comes through a believing reception of the sacrament. As St. Thomas put it in his "Adoro Te Devote:"

"Sight, touch and taste in These are each deceived.  
The ear alone most safely is believed.  
I believe whatever the Son of God has spoken,  
Than Truth's own word, there is no truer token."

## During Audience, Pope Criticizes South African Apartheid System

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has strongly criticized South Africa's apartheid segregation system and offered support to blacks who "suffer the violence of such an inhuman situation."

"Our repudiation of every form of racial discrimination is firmly believed and total," he said Aug. 7 at the end of his weekly general audience.

It was the first public comment by the pope on the situation in South Africa since the white-minority government declared a state of emergency July 20 in 36 black townships. The government said the order was needed to quell increasing racial violence.

More than 500 people have been killed in the last 18 months in anti-government rioting.

Recent news from South Africa has caused "profound emotion in worldwide public opinion, presenting anew to human consciences the always resurging problem of the so-called 'apartheid' policy," the pope said.

"To those who suffer the violence of such an inhuman situation, I express my loving participation and support," he added.

The pope asked South Africans to recognize the dignity of every person "in a climate of respect and dialogue."

The pope also asked that peace return to Uganda after the July 27 military coup and criticized the Burundi government for throwing out Catholic missionaries. Ten missionaries were expelled in March and about 100 missionaries have been expelled from Burundi since 1979. About 56 percent of the 4.4 million population professes

Catholicism in the African country.

Such expulsions limit "freedom of religion and pastoral action," said the pope. He asked that the situation be overcome through "good will by all."

Church-state relations in Burundi have been strained by the expulsions and by a government decision to control missionary-run schools and hospitals.

Earlier this year a Burundi official said that foreign missionaries were fomenting criticism of the government.

"They have been telling the people that our government is communist and therefore opposed to religion," said Banyiyezako Zacharie, Burundi's charge d'affaires in Kenya, last March.

The pope asked that Ugandans find "a true and lasting domestic peace" and be given assurances that the human rights of individuals and religious and ethnic communities be respected. About 40 percent of Uganda's 13.6 million population professes Catholicism.

The pope discussed the situation of the three African countries on the eve of his Aug. 8-19 visit to north and central Africa. None of the three countries is on the seven-nation itinerary.

The pope said the trip would provide the opportunity to witness many of the region's problems such as widespread famine, prolonged drought and growing refugee populations.

"Millions of Africans are afflicted by the repercussions of war and violence, accompanied by the sad burden of loss of respect for human life and rights," the pope said.

# On the Right Side

With Father Paul J. Cuddy



**From a down-hearted matron:**

"What can I tell a Catholic friend who had just returned to Mass and who suffered a double whammy on his return. I told him we have to be patient with priests who want 'to make the Mass relevant.' He had been away from the Church since his mother's death. The funeral was a catastrophe. I told him that we all have failings, be it a priest or lay person, but the Mass and Christ's teachings never change. One Sunday I saw him at Mass. We exchanged a smile, and I thanked God for his return.

"We talked about the Church and its problems since then. He told me he never felt welcome in the parish, and he is at a disadvantage because his wife and children attend a non-Catholic church. I recommended to him to seek a parish where a sense of community was encouraged. Recently I ran into him and asked how he likes his new parish. To my dismay, he has stopped going to Mass. He told me about recently attending his nephew's First Communion celebration, which took place near Syracuse. The celebrating priest wants to be called 'Charlie.' An audiovisual screen was dropped during Mass, showing youngsters playing and preparing for the reception of Holy Communion. After the First Communicants had received, the priest announced that anyone who believed in Christ could come and receive Him in this Holy Sacrament. His wife was upset by the fact that she knows Catholics believe in the Real Presence, and the priest was offering Communion to people who think it is only a symbol. What is the answer to all of this? Or do you have an answer?"

**Reply:**  
I feel deeply the suffering, anger and frustration of any sincere person who is tripped and trapped by the looney goings-on in some rare parishes. But let's be fair. These things are rare, at least in our diocese. I do know two parishes where at Communion time, on occasions of funerals and weddings, the priest announced: "Unless you hate God, you are invited to come for Communion." Utterly wrong, but I do not know that anyone can do anything about it. A few

clerics assume an infallibility that even our Holy Father does not claim, and make up their own rules and regulations, their own liturgies and theology, supplying their own whims for the directions of the liturgical regulations and canon law, and affect a subjective theology. If they were in England, they probably would drive on the right side of the road.

Yet even these, as erratic as they are, oftentimes have a gift of helping people in time of stress. I know one priest whose Mass would give most of us the creeps. Yet he is very effective helping troubled marriages and troubled teen-agers.

Regarding the impersonality or coldness or indifference in some parishes, I suppose part of the problem is that some parishes are so large. St. Charles Borromeo in Greece seems to have a solution, and it must have 2,000 families. Father Emmett Halloran is the pastor. The parish is divided into 21 sections. Definite parishioners who can be depended on are appointed quasi-overseers of sections, and coordinate with the priests and deacons, brothers and sisters, and sundry ministers and helpers in the parish. So, when a new family moves into the parish, they are welcomed. When sickness comes, it is noted and action is taken. If death or other tragedy comes, there is a concerned group to share in the grief and to assist. When a new baby arrives the joy is shared and arrangements made for baptism. Where there are children, arrangements can be made for the parish school, which I think is the largest in the diocese. When the children do not go to the parish school, the CCD program is presented. Parishioners in hospitals are not overlooked; and a group that is often overlooked by parishes — those in nursing homes or household — is visited and cheered. The sacraments are brought to the sick, and unless I am mistaken, there is a kind of St. Vincent de Paul set up for the needy and unemployed.

It is true that cordiality is often missing in our big parishes; and cordiality has to do with the heart with which we practice our religion. I do hope your friend comes back home, and his wife and children with him. Just think what he could offer to a parish from his own sad experiences.

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