

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



## Real food and drink

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:51-59; (R1) 10:16-17; (R2) 1 Cor. 10:16-17.

All three of the synoptic gospels — Matthew, Mark and Luke — describe the institution of the Holy Eucharist. In John's gospel it is missing — or is it?

John's Last Supper account opens with a reference to Christ's "hour" and His "pass over from this world to the Father" (13:1). Then six chapters follow explaining the "passover" — the implications of the death of Jesus.

Writing for Christians familiar with the Eucharist, John chose another Passover to describe the Eucharist. As chapter six opens, we learn that "The Jewish feast of the Passover was near" (v. 4). John uses this feast to give us his theology of the Eucharist. The Chapter has 71 verses — all closely knit together, forming a single unit.

First, he tells the story of the miracle of the loaves and the fish (6:1-15). All four gospels narrate this event. But in John, Jesus holds center stage; He directs the entire action.

This miracle is followed by His walking on water. He does this to allay the fears of His disciples, who are caught in a storm. He says to them, "It is I; do not be afraid!" What is translated as "It is I" reads literally in the Greek as "I am" (the name for God). This truth that Jesus is God calms their fears (6:16-21).

Following these two miracles, Jesus gives a talk on faith and then on the Eucharist.

First, He tries to elevate the thoughts of the crowd — tagging after Him because of the miracle of the loaves — from perishable bread to a bread that will give eternal life. They ask for this bread, and Jesus answers, "You've got to have faith!"

Nor was He asking too much in view of the miracles most of them had witnessed. He proved He could do anything with ordinary bread — He had fed 5,000 with five loaves. And He could do anything with His body — He had walked on water. Why shouldn't one believe Him, and in Him?

Twice in His talk, Jesus used the divine name: "I am the bread of life" (v. 35); and "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (v. 41). In essence, he was saying, "This is what you must believe, that I am the Son of God. Such faith in me shall be for you bread — the bread of life!"

Then Jesus shifted from talking about faith to eating.

As Jesus is "bread" for those who believe He is God's Son, so He is "bread" for those who eat the Eucharistic bread. This bread is His flesh. As the Father gives the Son to the world, to enable people to have a life of faith in Him, so Jesus gives His flesh to nourish the life of believers.

Again the crowd murmured, "How can He give us His flesh to eat?" (v. 52).

Whenever Jesus was misunderstood, He explained away the misunderstanding. When Nicodemus misunderstood His reference to rebirth, Jesus explained. When His disciples misunderstood His remark that "Lazarus sleeps," He explained. Here, when the crowd took Him literally when He spoke of eating His flesh and blood, Jesus not only did not explain as though they had misunderstood; rather, He reaffirmed more strongly what He had been saying. He changed words: for *phagein* (the Greek word "to eat") He substituted the much stronger word *trophein* (the Greek word "to crunch"). Thus "If you do not eat (*phagein*) . . . he who feeds (*trophein*),"

Then to emphasize still more the literalness of His words, Jesus said, "My flesh is real food and my blood real drink." As the manna sustained God's people till they passed over from Egypt to the Promised Land (R1), so the Eucharist (His flesh and blood) will sustain His followers (believers) as they pass over from this world to the next — "the man who feeds on this bread shall live forever" (v. 58).

If God could have a passion, it would be this: His all-consuming desire that we have life — not just the passing life of this earth, but the unending life of joy with Him forever. Nine times in the gospel, the words "life," "live" and "living" appear.

This desire of God for our eternal life is echoed in our heart's desire for a happy life without end. We want every story — and thus our lives — to end something like this: the prince went off with the princess and they lived happily ever after.

And it is precisely here that Jesus offers to meet us — namely, where it matters: in the radical hungers of the human heart. To be human is to be hungry: hungry to know and be known, to love and be loved, to live now and live forever.

The bread of life alone can allay this hunger.

Cindy Bassett

# The Bible Corner



## A stoning near Jerusalem

Paul stood with the others who witnessed the killing of Stephen just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Stephen had been a follower of the Way and had received the death sentence. Death by stoning required great strength on the part of those who merely witnessed the spectacle.

Paul's own mind had been firmly fixed on the importance of upholding Hebrew law. As a Pharisee, Paul was well-versed in offenses against the law and the resulting punishment. He was thoroughly convinced that Stephen's execution was a necessary evil. Perhaps, too, it would serve to frighten the rest of the followers of the Way into abandoning their cause.

The witnesses at Stephen's trial had all testified to his crime of blasphemy. Stephen had been preaching throughout the region against God and Moses. It was also brought to the court's attention that Stephen wanted to destroy the temple and the laws.

Paul had never actually heard Stephen preach about such things. But when the testimony was presented, he wanted justice served immediately. Paul was a devout Pharisee, and Hebrew law formed the basis for his entire life.

Paul did not cast any stones against the accused, but he was part of the entire miserable business just the same. Those who had stoned Stephen had come before Paul first, to carefully place their coats in his safekeeping as if they wanted to make certain that Stephen's blood did not stain them.

Just before Stephen fell to his knees and died, Paul heard the victim utter the oddest words. "Lord, don't charge them with this crime!" Stephen prayed.

Paul was still puzzling over this statement when the executioners returned in haste for their coats. Under Hebrew law, those who cast the first stones were the same witnesses who had brought the charges against the accused at the trial.

"Where is our payment?" one of these men demanded.

"Payment?" Paul returned. "I have no idea of what you speak."

"We were paid half the money ahead of time to serve as witnesses before the council," a rough-looking individual stated. "And after the stoning, we were promised the rest of our money."

"Then you must go to those who made such a promise," Paul said flatly, turning away.

This was Paul's first clue that something had gone awry with Hebrew

justice. He went immediately to the temple to see Caiaphas, the high priest.

As Paul waited outside of Caiaphas's chambers, he brushed aside all misgivings over Stephen's trial. Instead, he became even more convinced that all of the present unrest in Jerusalem could be traced back to these followers of the Way. Jesus, their leader, had been killed, but these believers continued in their attempts to overthrow Hebrew law. Paul was determined to get at the very root of the problem, so he decided to take extreme action.

Caiaphas was pleased to see this young man standing before him. Paul came from a well-respected family that had been granted the special privilege of Roman citizenry. He was one of Gamaliel's students and one of Jerusalem's expert teachers of Hebrew law.

After Caiaphas had listened to Paul's reason for coming, his crafty eyes lit up. Just for a fleeting moment, he was reminded of another young man full of this same zeal, who had come to offer his assistance to Caiaphas. Judas had been a great help in dealing with the problem of Jesus. Now Paul offered his services to eliminate another problem — those followers of the Way who stubbornly persisted in their belief in Jesus.

Paul requested a letter of authorization from Caiaphas to take with him to the synagogues in Damascus. He intended to go to this city and arrest those who had fled from Jerusalem when Stephen had been arrested.

Caiaphas was most obliging to him, and with this letter and several men to help him, Paul set off immediately for Damascus.

Meanwhile, in a house in Jerusalem, the apostles still met on a regular basis. James looked around the upper room and commented to Peter, "Our numbers are much smaller today. Fear of death is a powerful force against us."

"Belief in Jesus is far stronger," Peter replied. "The church continues to grow, despite the persecution. Many of our followers have fled, but a strange thing has happened. They continue to preach about Jesus, and there are many new believers as a result."

"That's encouraging," James said. "I suppose that with the Lord's help, we should not be surprised at anything that happens."

Scripture Reference: Acts 6:8; 9:2.

### St. John Fisher to host institute in arts for gifted children

The Summer Arts Institute for Gifted Children will be held at St. John Fisher College in two-week sessions.

The institute, which will be hosted by Dr. Rosemary S. Callard, will host its first session from July 7 to July 18, and its second

session from August 4 to August 15. Both sessions run from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The fee for each two-week session is \$215. For information, contact Callard at (716)473-1352 or the professional development office at Fisher at 385-8320.

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