

The problem that Jesus is experiencing with the crowds is that they're coming about it the wrong way, all this way to ask the wrong questions – and so much preaching on this subject does too. “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled.” **They cannot look past bread.** So when we hear homilies that talk about the Eucharistic species being what we know bread to be – *but like WAY bigger* – we miss the Lord's point.

Even though the Jews have, not only witnessed, but *participated* in a sign of Christ's divine power, they still need convincing. And so they ask Jesus to perform again a mighty deed from their history: manna in the desert. And here is where Jesus makes His point, which is this: the Eucharist is not like bread, but **bread is like the Eucharist.**

You'll say, “I think you have your timeline off, Father. There was bread for thousands of years before the institution of the Eucharist. Even at our own Mass we have gifts of bread and wine that change into Christ's Body and Blood.” Hear me out! Christ is talking about what we might call *pre-remembrance*. We all know what it is to reminisce, we call to mind a memory. This weekend we have the parish carnival – the fifty-fourth! Some can recall when it started and their parents there and how it's changed – that's reminiscing. For the crowds the collective, Jewish memory of being miraculously fed on the way to the Promised Land. Yet what Jesus asks in *pre-remembrance* is for them to imagine that their experience of bread is what reminds them of something that predates their memory *but for which they have always longed*. In fact, the people ironically express this desire when they say, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” when we know from the very first lines of John's gospel that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The German theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, says: “The

‘original sin’ is not primarily that man has ‘disobeyed’ God; the sin is that he ceased to be hungry for him and for him alone.... God acted so that man might understand who God really was and where his hunger had been driving him. **Christ is our bread – because from the very beginning all our hunger was a hunger for him**” (*For the Life of the World*).

At the parish where I was in Columbia, it’s the custom to announce the liturgical ministers before each Sunday Mass – a way to promote participation, but full disclosure, I find it a way of turning the sacred liturgy into a talk show (“Tonight at Mass our lectors are...”). There is also the custom to ask if there are any guests in the congregation – of course, a way to extend hospitality. I, however, never asked guests at Mass to stand and introduce themselves – that’s not because I didn’t want to be welcoming. Rather, it was because, one, I would find that awkward as a guest; it’s the church equivalent of going to a Mexican restaurant on your birthday and the waiters come put a sombrero on your head and sing “Feliz Cumpleaños” – it’s sweet but mortifying.... And two, I didn’t ask guests to be recognized because regardless of where you come from, every baptized Catholic coming to Mass is not a stranger but is *home*!

To feel “at home,” is a very powerful sensation. You may love to travel, to sight see the wonders of the world, but let me ask you this: How good does it feel to come *home*? And just maybe you’ve had the experience of being somewhere for the first time and feeling strangely at peace – that it felt like *home*. This is *pre-reminiscence*! We need a renewed sense of what it means to be at home with the Lord in the Eucharist. Christ’s miracle is a sign of God’s abiding love for His people – more than merely a sign because it’s His *very self* that He brings. St. Paul told us a few Sundays back, **Christ** “is our

peace,” creating a lasting communion between God and man. When put to death, Jesus could’ve called on the powers of heaven to destroy his enemies. But He didn’t. Instead of responding to human sin and violence in kind, He bore them up on the Cross. And by assuming them, He overcame them! He does not create a simple fix for us by turning stones to bread, but in turning a destiny of *nothing*, of *oblivion*, of *immortal homelessness* into an eternal dwelling with God – the God who transforms minds away from merely what we have only ever known, to a joy we know to be written on our hearts.

When our Fr. Regis, of happy memory, would come upon a grand spread of food at a special occasion in the monastery, he’d rhetorically ask in his semi-palsied, characteristic lilt: “All this and heaven too?!” Brothers and sisters, let us not forget what the gift of Christ, the Bread of Life, is for us. *The Eucharist is not like bread but bread is like the Eucharist!* It is the pledge to a pilgrim Church of our ultimate homecoming. In this Sacrament, He makes Himself **finite** so that we might become **infinite**. Thus, our hunger for Him must grow; because if we’re to become one with the God who is an Infinity of Love, we will spend our heaven never ceasing to grow in the communion it begins.