

This Sunday is not the end of the Bread of Life Discourse, but it's certainly its climax. We've been through the miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves, Christ has challenged the crowds not to follow their bellies but what's ultimately satisfying, and He's even stated that the mighty deeds of the Exodus were just a copy and shadow of the Bread from Heaven that He is. Jesus' disciples have followed His reasoning up to this point, until He says: "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." "How can this man," they question, "give us his flesh to eat?"

Now we're all pretty jaded these days, pretty desensitized to violence. But if you're like me, every now and then you don't read the Catholic News Service review of a movie and all of a sudden there's gore and blood and body parts coming off the screen that shock you viscerally. The crowds are **scandalized** by Christ's words that they must *eat His flesh* and *drink His blood*, because on a gut level eating a human is disgusting. Yet they're also scandalized on a religious level. Remember that the Jewish people had God-given dietary laws, one of the biggest being: not to eat blood in meat. Why? Because, as it says over and over in the Old Testament: "make sure you do not eat of the blood; for blood is life" (Deut. 12:23). The Jews are scandalized because Christ is asking them to sacrilege the privileged place of God – giver and consumer of life.

Christ offended the crowds. At this point it would behoove him to walk it back; it'd be *AT LEAST* His chance to explain that when He said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood He meant it only *symbolically*, only as a *metaphor* for putting His teachings at the center of their lives. Right? But that's not what He does. ***Instead Christ doubles down***. He not only restates the necessity to eat and drink Him, but He says you must *feed* on me. Bible scholars point out the word used here isn't the Greek for how

humans eat but instead for how animals do. It'd be more equivalent to Christ saying, "You must *tear* my flesh... You must *munch* on my body... You must *lap* and *slurp* my blood." When given the opportunity to explain away what His Eucharistic Body is, He only intensifies the meaning!

It marvels me what no longer scandalizes Catholics. Skipping the Sunday Mass obligation; taking the Lord's name in vain in casual conversation; two Catholic kids living together before they're married – these no longer seem to scandalize anyone but your old fashioned, naïve priest. So maybe it won't shock you when I say I'm taken aback that I continue to hear extraordinary ministers of holy communion refer to the Eucharist saying, "I'll take the wine, you take the bread." Listen, what we partake of from the altar is no symbol, no mere reminder of the saving sacrifice of Christ – it's a representation of that event given now in an unbloody way.

[The reason we recite the Creed every Sunday is not because we had to add one more boring part to the Mass. I know for most professing the Creed is like reading out of the phonebook – wait, some of us here are too young to even know *what a phonebook is* – it's like reading the Contact List on your smartphone.... But every word of the Creed was fought for, sometimes literally at Church Councils – *people died for those words!* Over time Jews stopped enunciating the name of God and replaced it with *Adonai* or "Lord," because it was too sacred even to breathe.] The Church uses the Latin expression: *Lex orandi, lex credendi* – which means, "the law of prayer is the law of belief." In other words, how we pray forms us in what we believe; **we're not primarily taught the faith at a desk but on our knees.** Christ says at the Last Supper: "Take this all of you and *eat* of it. This *is* my Body. *Do this* in remembrance of me," and "unless

you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.” It’s unacceptable to refer to the Real Presence as bread and wine.

But maybe you’ll say, I’m fussy. “Father, c’mon, *you know what I mean!*” Well, imagine this: when you walk out of Mass today I’m out there in front of the church and I greet you saying, “Hey Bozo! Blessed Sunday, Bozo.” You’ll shake my hand wearily with a nervous laugh and walk away thinking, “Why did Father... Father... oh I still don’t know how to pronounce his name.... Why did Father call me that? Was making a joke?” Then later this week I see you at the grocery store and from across the aisle I say, “Hey Bozo! How’s it goin’, Bozo?” And this time you’re a little more assertive, I mean gee-whiz, it’s the Thriftway of all places! You say to me, “Father, *Bozo*’s not my name. That’s a clown name.” And I’ll say, “Ah, yeah, *but you know what mean!* “No, my name is *Jane*,” you’ll reply. “Oh well, gosh I thought you went by Bozo. I thought you were from Conception Junction – they all got nicknames over there – I didn’t mean nothing by it.” After that you go off satisfied that at least Fr. Pachomius has been set straight and you won’t suffer this indignity anymore. Then the following Sunday you show up in the sacristy to be reader and the two altar servers greet you, exclaiming: “Hi Bozo!” *Word travels fast in a small town....*

**The law of prayer is the law of belief.** The words we use matter. Maybe why Catholics call the Eucharist bread and wine is laziness, maybe dissent, or just poor catechesis. But I do know this: even if we believe this is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ and we don’t respect it as such, our children and our children’s children won’t believe that it is.

Today Jesus scandalizes even good disciples who've left all to follow Him.

Today, I may've shocked and offended you. But the Church is asking us to re-examine our *relationship to* and *reception of* the Eucharist. We're not cannibals eating body parts, but Christ's point is that we are consuming the *totality* of who He is present as living bread – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The Jewish people couldn't eat the life force of creatures, but the God-made-flesh gives us the terrifying and great scandal of taking into ourselves *His* life force! That means that if we're a Eucharistic minister, we should treat the sacrament we carry like being awarded the entire Powerball earnings in a briefcase – with fear if we should lose any part of it and with joy that we have more power in our hands than anyone alive! When we receive communion, we should approach it like someone with terminal cancer about to get not only the cure to the disease but the antidote to death itself! “Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”

[As much as I'm concerned about the way we talk about and handle the Eucharist because of how it forms future generations, I'm inspired when I see our teens joined with thousands of youth at the Midwest Steubenville Conference adoring the Blessed Sacrament. How jaded our young people can be today: every comfort present, all information instantly available at the fingertips, unimpressed by anyone over the age of twenty-two. Yet before this small windowed monstrance looking at what to our eyes seems to be *just bread*, they drop to their knees, raise their hands, weep with tears streaming down cheeks – because they recognize in it their Lord and Savior truly present, coming to them with abundant life welling up into eternity.]