

## THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:51-58

*Feast on the living bread.*

The incarnation, the fact that God has become man, is the most important event and truth in human history. In the early church, and even in many Lutheran Churches to this day, the congregation would stop, kneel, and observe a brief silence during the part of the creed where they confessed this truth. This is the *foundation* of our salvation (1 Corinthians 3:11). It is the *reason for the hope that we have* (1 Peter 3:15). Our salvation rests in the flesh and blood person of Christ. Unfortunately, this was the very point that many in the crowd missed in our lesson. As they focused on his unspectacular human lineage, on his family tree according to the flesh, on his father and brothers, they failed to hear His true Father and come to the only-begotten Son of God.

We've been in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel for three weeks now. If you recall from a few weeks ago, we read the account the feeding of the 5,000. This was a wonderful miracle, but it was just that—a miracle, that is, a sign. This awesome and incomprehensible meal really pointed to another, more important meal, the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of the incarnate Son of God through faith.

We often teased one of my classmates from seminary because, at the beginning of our second year there, his wife was teaching full-time at an area school, while, unlike the rest of us, he wasn't working at all. Our good-natured ribbing rose to a new level when his wife told us a story about bread. One day this friend had gone to make a sandwich and discovered something he did not like: there was little piece of mold one slice of bread. His wife told him just to tear off that part or have another slice, but he was insistent he could not eat moldy bread. He simply did not want it. Of course, this only led to new jokes about his now rich tastes and danty tastebuds.

In our lesson today, we encounter more people who discovered bread they did not want, bread that was below them: Jesus, the living Bread that gives eternal life. What really turned the crowd away from Jesus, was not an unwillingness to listen, or Jesus' preaching style—in fact the Gospels tell us He was quite the preacher; it was Jesus' message. When the people grumbled against Jesus claim to be Bread from heaven, Bread of life, Bread of God, Jesus had the audacity to claim that, despite of their consternation, He was nevertheless the **ONLY** Bread that gives eternal life, life found in His flesh and blood, His humanity, assumed for our sake, and offered on Calvary.

And the world hasn't changed since Paul's time. It still wants its own bread. It still wants to invent its own ways to God and to make Him in their image. As a former seminary professor used to say, "People will believe anything, so long as it isn't in the Bible" (Dr. Becker). And we all at times fall into that trap of thinking there has got to be a better Way, better Bread, or that we can pick and choose His teachings like a meal at Old Country Buffet. But Jesus doesn't ask what we want to eat or if we like it. He tells us what God has given us, which is precisely what we need: Himself, the Son of God sent from heaven as the only Way for us to ascend there as well. Grumble as we might, that doesn't change the truth.

If at times this Bread from Heaven doesn't seem appetizing, we shouldn't be surprised. Like many of the best things in life, it is an acquired taste. Our sinful nature detests the flavor of heaven. That is why Jesus says, "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*" The Father brings us to Christ. The Father works in us a desire for this Bread. Literally, the Father does not only draw us, but, in the original language, drags us, like a stubborn, naughty child taken hold of by his mother and dragged inside. When you doubt, when you second-guess, don't try to muster some certainty or peace in and of yourself. Rather, trust God to do the dragging. Hear His Word, and He will take your ear and drag you, leaving no doubt about where your answer, where your strength, where your future is. "*Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.*" Don't let the flesh and blood fool you. This Bread has come down from heaven.

The best food in the world is offered to us in our Holy Gospel today. Don't eat half-heartedly. Feast. I love the Greek word used here for eating. It means to chew and gnaw, like a cow feeding on hay. It is conscious, thoughtful, unrushed feasting. It is the feasting of faith on the promises and blessings of the God who gave it. It is the feasting of faith on the living Bread, the only living Bread, that satisfies the desires of the hungry heart and fills the starving soul with heavenly succor.

"*Taste and see that the LORD is good*" (Psalm 34:8). Yeah, eat a lot of pig today. Have a second serving of dessert. But don't forget the richest fare that is served here. Feast on the living bread that gives life and sustains it. Hunger for it, even when you've just left the table. Feast again and again. You will never get too full. The more you eat, the healthier you will be. This Great Physician wants you to stuff yourself so that you don't get winded in your Christian walk. Grow fat on His mercy. Christ says, "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*" Give thanks to our God, for what tastes so sour to the world is sweet as honey to our souls (Psalm 19:10). Amen.