

“This is my Body”

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Mt 26:26-28, RSV)

Similar sayings are in the Gospel according to Luke and Mark, but not in the Gospel according to John – where his Last Supper scene describes the washing of the Apostles’ feet. The discourse on Holy Communion in John, however, is found in Chapter Six, starting at verse 35 and intensifying from verse 48 onwards.

“I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51, NJB).

“In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53, NJB).

“For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink” (Jn 6:55, NJB).

The above three verses are parts of Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Below are the reactions from some of his listeners. “After hearing it, many of his followers said, ‘This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?’... After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more” (Jn 6:60, 66, NJB).

Various Christian communities like to interpret Jesus’ sayings literally. The disciples described above certainly did. But, unlike some of those Christian communities, it was not the reason why the disciples stayed with him. It was the reason why they left him!

While they were walking off, an astounding thing happened. Jesus did not shout out after them in panic: “Wait. Stop. Please don’t go. I used the wrong words. I was only speaking in symbols. I don’t mean what you think I was saying. You don’t eat me – you eat bread and drink wine.” No! He let them go! He was speaking most literally!!! He meant every word he said. This was the sacrament of his limitless love, the food that would lead to life everlasting, and one tangible way he chose to keep his promise: “I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28:20, NJB).

He asserted, “Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day” (Jn 6:54, NJB).

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person” (Jn 6:56, NJB).

“As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me” (Jn 6:57, NJB).

Jesus sometimes identifies himself (or someone else like John the Baptist or St. Paul identifies him) as an entity like the lamb of God, or the good shepherd, or light, love, peace, the resurrection, etc. An example is seen in the gospel according to John where Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6, NIV). This is different from saying, “I show the way, I proclaim the truth, I give life.” Jesus is telling us that to find the way we have to walk along him; to know the truth we need to know him; to have life we must live in him.

So, when he says, “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35, NIV), what do you think he wants you to do?

