

My friends in Christ, our Parochial Year for Evangelization continues, and for the next few weeks, our Parochial Year coincides with the Gospel account of Saint John, Chapter Six (the Bread of Life Discourse), to which we were introduced last weekend. And so we consider how the Bread of Life – the Eucharist – plays *such* a crucial role in our every effort to unleash the Gospel and thus evangelize the nations.

But first, a brief recap of how our Parochial Year for Evangelization has unfolded thus far; we began on Christ the King (last November), and through the Advent and Christmas seasons, we focused in a particular way on our own discipleship – for we cannot give what we do not have; and we cannot share with others He Whom we ourselves do not even know); then, through the seasons of Lent and Easter, we shifted from discipleship to evangelization as such (what it is, why it is really so important, and so on); then, as we eased into summer, we launched directly into the very crux of the matter, the very essence of evangelization – unleashing the Gospel.

And now taking us into the fall as we make our way to the conclusion of our Parochial Year for Evangelization on Christ the King *this* year, we shift into a specific component of evangelization that, though crucial, is nevertheless a largely forgotten component, it seems: apologetics.

What *is* apologetics? Apologetics is, just like it sounds, offering an apology. But by that, we do not mean that we go around telling everybody in the world how sorry we are for being Catholic, as if our faith in Jesus Christ – the very core of our identity – were a cause for utter embarrassment and shame! No, rather, in *this* instance, by “apology,” what we mean is simply “defense.” We seek to defend our faith in Jesus simply by explaining it, by answering objections to it, by entering into a rational and reasonable discourse with others about it with the expectation at the *very* least of being strengthened in our *own* faith in Jesus but also in the hope and with the intention of inspiring some measure of conversion in those with whom we debate...to whom we “apologize.”

And so, given that the Bread of Life Discourse is upon us, we seek now to “apologize” for our Catholic belief in the Eucharist – that is, to offer our defense in explaining the Eucharist. And why this is important should be obvious; with the possible exception of our Catholic veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Eucharist is what makes Catholics stand out amongst all of the many

Christian denominations, and therefore the Eucharist often is the final stumbling block for people making their pilgrimage of faith back home to the Catholic Church.

Fortunately for us, the Eucharist (and all that we profess about the Blessed Sacrament) is all rooted right here in Sacred Scripture. We think primarily, perhaps, of the Last Supper narratives, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and also in First Corinthians; what the Last Supper narratives do is reveal to us *how* to *do* Eucharist, so to speak (“He Himself took bread, and giving...thanks, He said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to His disciples, saying: ‘Take this, all of you, and eat of it.’”), and also *why* (“...for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of Me”). The Last Supper narratives also reveal *what* the Eucharist *is* (“This is My Body.... This is the Chalice of My Blood”).

When Jesus gave thanks at the Last Supper, He named the Eucharist; the word itself in fact means “thanksgiving.” And we give thanks for what? For the gift of salvation, given us by God in the Sacrifice of His Son on the Cross, the very eve of which was when Christ offered the first Mass at the Last Supper.

And so, the Last Supper narratives reveal to us the *how* and the *why* and the *what* of the great mystery of the Eucharist; what the Bread of Life Discourse does, then, is expound particularly upon the *what*: what the Eucharist is...or more to the point *Who* the Eucharist is...and it even offers us a glimpse of where the Eucharist is foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament – even preordained by God the Father almost from the very beginning.

The best clue that shows us how the Eucharist was foreshadowed throughout much of the Old Testament is the fact that the Eucharist was instituted at the Lord’s Last Supper, which (as we know) was the Passover. The Eucharist is a meal. Explore the Bible and discover that there are in fact *many* meals all throughout Sacred Scripture, and in probably every instance, wherever there is a meal...something *big* is happening. What happened immediately *before* the Bread of Life Discourse, in the first half of John Chapter 6? The miraculous feeding of the multitudes (the multiplication of loaves and fish). What happened at Cana? The wedding feast wherein Jesus revealed Himself with His first sign: the changing of water into wine. In the Old Testament, in Exodus, during the night of the tenth and final plague? The first Passover Supper. In Genesis, Abraham fixes a banquet for

his three angelic guests (the Holy Trinity, perhaps?), and God promises him that his wife Sarah will conceive and bear a son (their only son Isaac), even in her old age. And right at the very beginning of it all: Adam and Eve feast upon the forbidden fruit.... In the Bible, events that happen at a well are a nuptial encounter between a man and his bride-to-be; and whenever anyone is told to “be not afraid,” a most important life’s commission is about to be proclaimed; and similarly, wherever there is a meal...something *big* is happening. And the Last Supper (and, indeed, at every single Mass that is offered anywhere ever since), *that* is a meal where the *biggest* thing happens: mere bread becomes God...and we consume God...and in so doing, worthily and well, we are in turn conformed more perfectly to God; in a certain sense, we become very *like* God (as Saint Augustine says).

The Eucharist is the supreme sacrifice – the unbloodied Sacrifice of the Cross, made really and truly present for us in the here-and-now. And remember, the lamb is the animal offered up in the sacrifice of atonement and reconciliation. But Saint John the Baptist declared Jesus Himself to be the *true* lamb, the *Lamb* of lambs as it were: “Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world.” And the Lamb was present there at the Last Supper – but now, wait a moment! There is not a single mention of lamb *anywhere* in *any* of the Last Supper narratives! And why is that? Because *Jesus* is the Lamb. No need, then, to mention a lamb because Jesus *Himself* is mentioned, and *He* is the Lamb.

Think about the road to Emmaus – the *second* Mass that was ever celebrated – after the Last Supper, of course. A peculiar detail is told about how the very *instant* when Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to His two disciples, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him – but He vanished from their sight. From their *sight*! But with the eyes of *faith*, we discover that even though Jesus vanished...He did not just up and leave; no, He was still present there – in the *Real Presence*, in the Eucharist, which He had just confectioned at that Mass on the road to Emmaus.

Okay, so we can see how the all-important meal of the Eucharist is foreshadowed in various ways in meals all throughout the *Old* Testament, and the Eucharist was instituted at the Last Supper and continued to be offered after the Resurrection throughout the *New* Testament...and the *hinge* is the Bread of Life Discourse. The first half of the Bread of Life Discourse surprisingly is *not* actually

about the *Eucharist* so much as it is all about faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ. We notice that the Lord *really* emphasizes *belief*. “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in the One He sent.” “What sign can You do, that we may see and *believe* in You?” “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will never hunger and whoever *believes* in Me will never thirst.” Belief is the emphasis. And the object of belief is *what?* The divinity of Jesus Christ. How often the theme of Moses and manna in the desert is mentioned! For the Jews, the manna was the bread come down from Heaven, and yet, Jesus corrects them: “I am the living Bread that came down from Heaven.” He proclaims it *several* times that He came down from Heaven. This twofold emphasis then on belief and on Jesus having come down from Heaven reveals for us that the crux of the matter in the first half of the Discourse is faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

And the Jews murmured at this. Well yeah! This is a revolutionary idea (and indeed, in *their* hearing, a most *absurd* idea at that)! But where *else* do the Jews murmur? They murmured at Moses, amid their exodus in the desert, just *before* Moses called upon the Lord to feed them and the manna was given.

So there is murmuring, and Jesus now, in the second half of the Discourse, shifts away from His central theme of *believing...to eating*. The *belief* (the *faith* to which He invites us) is this, that He is divine, He is the Son of God, He is the living Bread come down from Heaven. And now, He urges them to put that faith into action. But the Jews have issued a challenge; they laid down the gauntlet by reminding Him that *Moses* gave them manna – bread from Heaven – so what can *He* do? Moses gave them bread only while they were on exodus (forty years); but now, the Jews want Jesus to give them *His* Bread *always*. And so, He teaches them that *He* is the Bread of Life, and He is divine, for He is the Son of God, and therefore, He is *eternal*. And so in *Him* (and in *Him alone*), they *will* have this Bread *always*, for He *is* the Bread and He is everlasting.

And now, He commands them to *eat* Him.... Hm. Well, *that* took an odd turn. And here is where we lose a lot of our non-Catholic Christian brethren. Their contention is that Christ meant it only in a *spiritual* sense, a *metaphorical* sense; certainly *not* literally! But Jesus Himself says very clearly that “whoever *eats* this Bread will live forever,” and in the original Greek, the word that is used here

is *trogo*, which is a Greek word *never* used symbolically *or* metaphorically but rather is *always* used in a very literal, concrete sense: to *gnaw* on; the *chew*; to *munch*. (Or, if you prefer proper medical jargon, to *masticate*). Jesus probably did not speak or write much Greek, but Saint John did, and Saint John was right there when Jesus said all of this; therefore, who is more suited than him to interpret what Jesus meant when He said this?

But the follow-up challenge to this Catholic Christian claim of the Bread of Life is this: how is this *not* cannibalism? But given that my homily has already gone on for quite long enough – and a lot of you are sleeping by now already! – I leave *that* question to be answered in my Pastor’s Column in the bulletin for next weekend, so stay tuned.

One last point: I mentioned earlier that there is foreshadow of the Eucharist all throughout the Old Testament, that the Eucharist was preordained by God the Father from the very beginning; what that means is: Garden of Eden. But how was the Eucharist foreshadowed, pre-ordained way back when in the Garden of Eden? We remember that, in the Garden of Eden, there was the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – from which that meal where something big happened was the forbidden fruit on which Adam and Eve feasted. The Tree of Life (the name implies) was the very source of life for Adam and Eve; eating of *its* fruit was what empowered them to live forever. We know this because this is stated explicitly in Genesis Chapter 3: after Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, the Triune God holds council with Himself, saying, “The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil...what if he *also* reaches out his hand to take fruit from the Tree of Life, and eats of it and *lives forever*?” The only other instance in Scripture where the phrase “live forever” is used (in the context of a meal)...is right here in the Bread of Life Discourse: the Lord says, “I am the living Bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats *this* Bread will *live forever*.” Indeed, Jesus Christ is the *true* Bread from Heaven, the *true* Fruit on the Tree of Life that is the Cross, to which we who believe are summoned to banquet and upon which invited to feast.

May it be then that *we* would be strengthened in *our* faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, so that we may then partake humbly of the Eucharistic Feast and so receive the Bread of Life worthily and well as our pilgrim journey of faith here on Earth continues toward halls of heavenly realms.