



Homily - 18th Sunday

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday, 2 August 2015

In this morning's gospel we begin reading from chapter six of the Gospel of Saint John, in which we find Jesus speaking of himself as the bread of life. This story will be told in four parts over the next four Sundays and will conclude with some of his hearers walking away from him because they find his teaching to be offensive and intolerable. In response to this Jesus will ask his own disciples if they too are going to desert him. Simon Peter, the leader of the disciples, speaks up on their behalf. I hope we might see him as speaking on our behalf too, especially when we find some of the demands of our faith a little too difficult to cope with. *"Where else can we go?"* Peter says to Jesus. *"You have the words of eternal life"*.

What is so offensive to the ears of many of Jesus' hearers is his insistence that he is the bread of life, and that only through eating this bread of life can we have the gift of life, both now and for eternity. In today's gospel Jesus introduces this idea. In the next few weeks the unfolding of this theme will show how serious Jesus is. *"The bread that I will give you"* he will say, *"is my flesh, for the life of the world"*. As it begins to dawn on people that Jesus is speaking very forcefully, and wants to be taken very seriously, he becomes even clearer. *"My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him"*. It is the clarity of this language, and we might say the "gritty-ness" of it, which is so offensive to so many - and they walk away.

In our Catholic tradition we have always taken Jesus at his word. We believe him when at the Last Supper he says of the bread and the wine as he hands them to the disciples, "this is my body; this is my blood". And this is why when, as we receive Communion at Mass, we reply "Amen" when the priest or minister holds the Host or the chalice before us and says, quite simply and starkly, "the Body of Christ – the blood of Christ". Our "amen" is our own act of faith in response to the announcement that what we are about to receive is not just bread, or even special or blessed bread - it is the Body of the Lord, and not just wine, even blessed wine, but the blood of the Lord. Our belief in what we have called the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a firm and unshakeable dimension of our faith.



What we sometimes forget is the "why" of this extraordinary gift. If we ask why the Lord puts himself, quite literally, into our hands, he himself gives us the answer. *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him."* Jesus gives us himself in the Eucharist so that we can be drawn into an extraordinary communion, an extraordinary intimacy, with him. He begins to live in us. More and more, if we allow it to happen, he begins to shape us and transform us into both his disciples and his friends so that, through us, he can enter into the lives of others. The Eucharist is a gift and a task. Jesus comes to us, lives in us, enables us to live in him, and makes of us instruments of his presence in the lives of those we meet. We might have, and indeed should have, a deep appreciation of, and profound reverence for, the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, but if this appreciation and reverence are not transforming us into signs and bearers of the Lord's love for his people, then we have failed completely to understand the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. And equally our appreciation of and reverence for the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist should lead us unfailingly to an appreciation of and reverence for the presence of the Lord in others, especially those who are poor, abandoned, or suffering in any way.

Another saying of Jesus can guide us here. *"By this will everyone know that you are my disciples: that you love one another as I have loved you."* This is the real test of our faith in the Eucharist. When we approach Holy Communion this morning, then, let us do our best to make our "Amen" our yes to all that the Lord's gift of himself to us in the Eucharist is asking of us. After all we have nowhere else to go - only he has the words of eternal life.