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Message for BBNeighbourhoods
28 April 2020

As we do each year in the third week of Easter, we are reading from the Sixth Chapter of Saint John's Gospel (John 6:22-69). It is traditionally known as the *Bread of Life Discourse*. I can recommend breaking it up over several days, simply because it is packed with spiritual treasures which are worth savouring a little at a time.

The passage that we will read on Friday has a strong image of flesh and blood (John 6:52-59). For the Jewish mind, it was an expression for the whole *person*. Our Christian understanding is a sacramental communion – a personal communion (encounter) with Jesus who shares His life and the life of His Father with us ^(v.53). For the non-believer there is **bewilderment**, however for the believer there is **assurance**, because Jesus does not take away anything of what He has said and He insists: "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person*".

To eat the flesh of Jesus, means to accept Jesus as the one whose blood unfetters us from slavery. To drink the Blood of Jesus, means to match our lives to the way of life that marked the life of Christ. What gives life is not to celebrate the manna of the past, but rather to eat this new bread, which is Jesus, in his flesh and his blood. By eating His body and drinking His blood, we probe and penetrate the mystery of faith – by becoming part of it.

When we participate in the Eucharistic Supper and Sacrifice, we incorporate His life, His surrender, His gift of self. "*If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and you do not drink His Blood, you will not have life in you*".

"*Whoever eats my flesh, will live in me*" ^(Jn 6: 56-58). The last phrases of the *Bread of Life Discourse* are profound and summarize everything that has been said. They recall the mystical dimension that surrounds the participation in the Eucharist.

They express what Paul says in the letter to the Galatians: "*It is no longer I, but Christ living in me*" ^(Gal 2:20) or again in the letter to the Philippians: "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" ^(Phil 1:21).

Or as Saint John says in the Gospel: "*Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we shall come to him and make a home in him*" ^(Jn 14:23).



During this time when physical attendance in the church building is restricted, we are discovering new ways to be part of the community of the Church. The extraordinary way our priests are reaching out by livestreaming Masses and prayer into your homes is drawing families into prayer in extraordinary ways. I have received many messages telling me that families are spending quality time in prayer together. Reading the Scriptures, praying intercessory prayers, grace before and after meals, the Rosary and other spiritual devotions are filling our homes and lives. While our way of celebrating is different for the time being, our communities are becoming a blessed society, where neither place or space, but grace alone becomes the link uniting one to one and all to God.

While we may not all be able to enter the church building for Mass, our prayer and worship, our physical or spiritual communion is a foretaste of the blessed communion which is to come. It reminds us that we are in communion with those about us and with those who have gone before us in faith. We become one through Jesus Christ with each other and in the communion of saints.

My sisters and brothers, I encourage you to approach the Lord's altar-table physically and spiritually with confidence, because He has prepared a place for each of us there and in His Kingdom.