

When something is very important, a teacher or parent might repeat it over and over to stress this. In essence, this is what the Church has been doing for the past few weeks with John 6 and the Bread of Life discourses. The Church asks us to listen to the message Sunday after Sunday – hoping we will truly get it and understand that this is IMPORTANT. The Bread of Life discourses concludes in this weekend’s gospel passage. I will in effect, try to tie it all together and hope that you might get it.

But first, let us return to Christmas, the incarnation, where it all began. Jesus was born where? Yes, I know you are not that forgetful – he was born in Bethlehem – and this was very symbolic. The name Bethlehem actually means: “House of Bread”. Yes, Jesus, the Bread of Life, was born in a place known as the House of Bread. Not only that, he was born in a stable, where the animals fed. The symbolism is obvious: Jesus was born to the world that he would one day feed the world, not with the stuff of the world, but with the food of eternal life.

In the readings we have heard from the past month one might notice there is a parallel in the Book of Exodus and that of John’s gospel – they are in a sense, alternating back in forth in time. The Hebrew people, free from the slavery of Egypt, grumble to God for food, which God provides to fill their stomachs and keep them alive. Then we are transported to the time of Jesus in which he feeds the 5000. Just as was the case in desert wandering, this will not be enough, as they will grumble for more.

And it is at this point that Jesus elucidates the deeper meaning. He in essence tells them, “I will no longer feed you with what only satisfies the stomach, but for that which feeds the soul.” Jesus said *"Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.... Unlike your ancestors who ate and died nonetheless, feed on me and live forever... Truly, truly, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Response: *"This is hard, who can accept this?"* As a result we are told many returned to their former life and no longer accompanied him.

Now, did Jesus try and stop them? Did he yell out: *"I was just kidding! The eating of my flesh and drinking my blood was just metaphor!"* No, he meant exactly what he said and so he let them leave. Turning to the Twelve, he asks: *"Do you want to leave me too?"* Well, Peter gets it – it clicks for him! *"You have the words of eternal life...we are convinced..."*

It is a question that all of us will have to answer throughout life. “The teachings of the Church is hard, who can accept this?” Or perhaps will be tempted to leave the faith for something else and his words will ring in our ears: *"Are you going to leave me, as well?"*

Now, think back to Egypt, when the Hebrew people were enslaved before departing for the Promised Land. To escape the Angel of Death, they had to find an unblemished lamb. You had to slaughter the lamb. You had to sprinkle the blood on the doorpost.

We fast forward to Good Friday and find that Jesus blood is splattered along the altar of the cross

that the Angel of Death might pass over us.

Flash back again to Egypt. They would slaughter the lamb and sprinkle its blood, but what if that is all they did? What would happen? They would find the Angel of Death had visited their home and taken the oldest because they had not eaten the lamb. The lamb had to die. Its blood sprinkled, but they had to *eat* the lamb to be saved.

Do you understand? Christ takes this upon himself as the Lamb of God. Christ died and his blood was shed. And as he clearly states in John 6, one must eat the lamb, his flesh and blood to be saved from the slavery of sin and be delivered from the Angel of Death.

The Book Leviticus forbid drinking of blood, stating one who does so will be cut off from family. Jesus might reply, "Right on, you will be cut off from the family of Adam for the new Adam and new covenant and new family – the family of God." The Lamb had to die and be eaten to restore family communion – which what we do every Sunday.

Picture yourself being in a pasture full of sheep and lambs. A ewe gives birth to a lamb, but it is stillborn. The mother is dying of a broken heart. In another portion of the flock, the shepherd finds a ewe that has given birth to another lamb. Yet the mother dies. The baby lamb is now starving.

Why not put the baby with the broken hearted mother? It will not work because the mother knows the lamb is not hers. She will push the orphan away and it starve.

The ancients would have understood how this even could have imaged their relationship to God. We are so alienated from one another that we are dying from starvation and God is dying of a broken heart. Only one thing can be done. The shepherd would know.

If he takes the dead lamb and drains its blood, he can wash the orphan in the blood of the dead lamb. The mother, smelling her own, immediately moves so that the orphan may suckle. The orphan is brought to the table and to life by its adoption through blood.

In John's gospel, the priests are slaughtering the lambs for the Passover meal and it is at this time that Jesus is being crucified on the altar of the cross. Jesus is the Passover Lamb for us. We are washed in the blood of the lamb that we might be considered God's again. The Messiah will be the lamb by which we were brought to an intimate relationship with God.

One final point – we heard from the Book of Joshua in our first meeting. You might recall that Joshua took up as the leader of the Hebrews after the death of Moses. It was Joshua who eventually led them from the desert to the Promised Land. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Joshua is *Jesus*.

It is Jesus who takes up the final mantel, leading his people into the Promised Land of everlasting life. And the food for journey, the means to eternal life, is found at this altar.