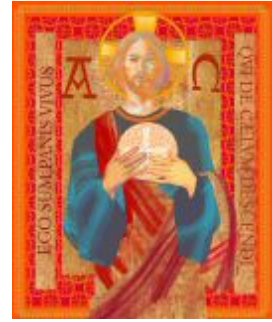




Fr Paul's Homily

9th August 2009
Nineteenth Sunday of the Year (B)



Ahab was the King of Israel. He married Jezebel because she was the daughter of Omri the King of Lebanon. The plan was to unite the two kingdoms. Ahab should have known better. Jezebel, apart from being an ambitious and unscrupulous woman, was a worshipper of Baal, the pagan God of the world of nature. Jezebel was unpopular and managed to incur the anger and opposition of Elijah the prophet who appears in our Old Testament reading from the First Book of Kings. Elijah was not happy because he had opposed Ahab and Jezebel and now she wanted his death. He felt that this was all too much and went into the wilderness and sat under a furze bush wishing for death.



After his sleep he woke to see an angel offering him food which he ate. The angel invited him not to give up but to continue with trust in the Lord.

The heavenly food that gave Elijah the strength to continue is a beautiful introduction to Jesus' words in the Gospel where Jesus continues to teach us about the bread that comes down from heaven. St. John makes it clear that Jesus speaks about this heavenly food at Passover Time in the synagogue at Capernaum. That Jesus should be speaking in a synagogue at Capernaum at Passover time about bread gives particular significance to what he is saying.

The Passover was the story of Israel's liberation from captivity and slavery and the beginning of the journey to a promised land which would be the answer to their wildest dreams about God's goodness in a world of peace and justice. And the bread which was eaten at the Passover Meal recalled the goodness and generosity of God sustaining and leading his people to life and joy, to life as God meant us to live it.

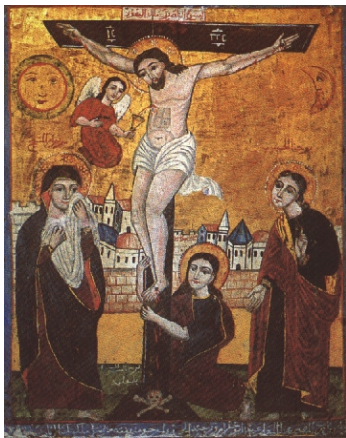
We gather for our celebration of Mass today because we believe that Jesus is the New Passover. Liberation from those things that destroy us, the promise and possibility of life as God intends us to live it, is made real, present and available in Jesus. As the letter to the Ephesians says "the Holy Spirit of God has marked you with his seal for you to be set free when the day comes."

That day is the day of our Lord Jesus Christ and for those who are baptised each day is lived in Christ and it is in him that we find freedom, joy and the fullness of humanity. That is why he describes himself as the bread which comes down from heaven. He is the way that leads to life. He is life itself. He is the bread of life which has the power to complete us as human beings and bring us into the promised land and it is this life that we call, and Jesus calls, "eternal life".

The temptation is to see eternal life as something that will be given us in the future, when we die and go to God. That's not how Jesus sees it because he says that everyone who believes has eternal life now, a life that will persevere through death which will bring perfection and fulfilment. Life, eternal life, is in fact sharing in the life and Spirit of Jesus Christ and there is no other life worth living nor can the fullness of life be found without him.

So Jesus speaks of himself as being the bread that comes down from heaven but notice how he does not remain with bread. He goes further and deliberately makes the connection with himself more real and concrete, so human and earthed, that his Jewish audience complain about him and are quite revolted. The bread that Jesus gives, the bread that is himself, is in truth his flesh and blood. John tells us that many stopped following him because they could not accept what he said.

Jesus gives us his flesh and blood because it is flesh and blood we have in common with him as the Word and Son of God. As we come to celebrate Mass and to consume the Lord himself we take into ourselves the gift which joins us to God and fills us with his life.



Jesus gives us his flesh and blood because his flesh and blood were separated on the Cross where he became the Passover Lamb in his sacrificial death. St. John tells us that after he had died the soldier came and pierced Jesus' side so that blood and water flowed out. The blood and water is the gift of the divine life poured out for us to consume and fill us because that is the only gift that can bring us completion, wholeness and joy and the end of our search.

Jesus gives us his body and blood so that we might be caught up in love with the God we cannot see. As we celebrate Mass and offer to God the Father the flesh and blood of his son we are drawn into the very experience that is the end of our journey and our fulfilment. This is the experience to which all our desires are leading, being part of the joyful love which is the life of God and the source of all meaning and unity.

Jesus gives us his body and blood so that we might eat and drink and be nourished literally by the life of God so that he might remain within us bringing eternal life. And this Gospel from John brings with it the opportunity to renew our belief and trust in the truth at the centre of our faith and life that bread and wine truly and perfectly and absolutely become the body and blood of Christ. His life, death and resurrection proclaim and underpin our belief in his real presence in the Eucharistic gifts.

Jesus gives us his body and blood so that he can remain with us all the time as that indispensable food for the sick and the dying. The real presence of Christ with us always because Jesus is the living bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone who eats it will live for ever. This makes possible the gift of the Last Sacrament which is called viaticum: The Lord's flesh and blood given as food for the journey to the fullness of life in God.

