

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST  
Year A June 22, 2014

Theme: Chew on That!

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In my research this week I came across this little goodie on a web blog:

*“Certainly the creepiest thing about the Christian religion is the practice of ritual cannibalism.”*

Then I ran across this posting by a former Catholic:

*“How many Christians realize that when they eat that wafer and drink the wine during the communion service that they, in effect, practice cannibalism by the partaking in the eating of human flesh and blood?”*

*Not only did I eat human flesh in my communion sacraments, but I also drank the "actual" blood of Jesus. Doesn't this make me a vampire also?”*

We who live the Catholic faith find this utter nonsense and foolishness, yet throughout the centuries Catholics have periodically been charged with cannibalism because of our insistence that in the Eucharist we eat and drink the true Body and Blood of Christ.

The words of Jesus in John’s Gospel, Chapter 6, adds ammunition to our critics:

**“my flesh is true food,  
and my blood is true drink.  
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him.”**

If not disgusting, at the very least Jesus’ words are kind of yucky sounding: **eat my flesh, drink my blood.**

Our theology says that through our prayers of consecration and the invocation of the Holy Spirit the substance of Bread and Wine are changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus.

At the same time, however, the accidentals of bread and wine – color, taste, smell, shape – remain the same.

That's what we mean by that monster Catholic word: transubstantiation, only the substance is transformed.

That sort of word splitting of medieval philosophy was obviously not on John's mind when he wrote his Gospel to a community of Christians living in the real world the first century.

Nor, I feel certain was the weird interest in cannibalism and vampirism of some in our time.

Rather, John wanted his Christians to nourish themselves on Jesus and how he lived his life and how he gave his life for them.

Even in English, don't we use eating and food images to express our desire to internalize and understand things?

Most basically, you may pick up your grandchildren and squeeze them tightly saying as you do: "I could just eat you up!"

I doubt you want to cannibalize them!

We talk about needing to "chew" on a decision for a couple of days.

We say some choices are "hard to swallow."

We find a glorious sunset or a Rembrandt painting a lot to "drink in".

Thus, when Jesus said: **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day."**

He must be speaking of those who nourish themselves, feed their souls on how he lived his life, how he served others, how he gave his flesh on the Cross.

He must be talking about those who drink in and come to deeply appreciate and imitate the way he poured out his very life as a gift to the Father and to all humanity.

People who so eat and so drink are people who will find eternal life.

In fact, scholars of the Greek language say the original word St. John used for “eat” and “feed” here carries the connotation of “chew on”, even “gnaw on”.

Thus, Jesus’ words could read: “They who chew on my flesh and swallow my blood will have eternal life.”

Isn’t that what we come together to do every Sunday in the Liturgy of the Word: we come to chew on the Word together, to chew on the flesh of Jesus Christ, what he did and said when he was in the flesh and among us.

We roll it around in our minds; we run it past our experience; we apply our questions to it; we consider what it means for our lives.

We drink it in and feel its soothing, healing, consoling goodness.

And sometimes we feel its prickling challenge or even its burning accusation.

And, then, through prayers of consecration and the invocation of the Spirit, we make Bread and Wine into Sacramental Signs of his Body and his Blood.

By eating and drinking these Sacramental Signs we are engaging in, not an act of cannibalism or vampirism, but an act of communion:

---communion between his life and our lives;

---communion between the way he lived and the way we are trying to live;

---communion between his Body and our bodies, between his Blood and our blood.