

FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
August 8, 2021
“The Father Calls and We Respond”

In today’s Gospel, we are currently in the bread of life discourse (Jn 6:41-51). We continue from where we left off last Sunday (Jn 6:24-35). The bread of life discourse is rather lengthy and so the church covers this very important segment of the Gospel of John over successive Sundays.

We recall how last Sunday we heard how Jesus was trying to bring about a transition in His disciples. A transition from a merely physical way of thinking into a more spiritual way of thinking. He said that they should stop seeking food for the body only – but seek rather the food that will bring them to eternal life. He will go on to say that He is that bread of life – and that “the bread He will give is His flesh for the life of the world.”

At this point they begin to grumble about what He said. They cannot understand how He can give them His flesh to eat. After all they say that He is only “the son of Joseph”! In other words, someone of little significance in their world. They will go on to say, “How can He claim to come down from heaven?”

At this point, Jesus will make a statement that is very significant from the perspective of the person who wants to believe, who is struggling to believe. He said: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”... “everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to me”.

Jesus is asking them to accept and believe something that is beyond the mere human’s ability to explain. No one has ever spoken to them like this. His words are completely foreign to them. It will require an act of the Father in heaven to help bring them around to believing these particular words of Jesus. “You cannot come to me (i.e. have faith in my words) unless the Father draws you.”

Jesus gives His flesh, the bread of life, for us to eat in the Holy Eucharist, the consecrated bread and wine. For a person to have faith in this reality will require an act of God, divine assistance. God the Father will initiate within us the desire to believe this. He will draw us to believe in the real presence. This act of drawing us to faith is called preeminent grace. God initiates within us the grace to believe, but He only initiates, He does not force our will. On our part we must respond to this grace, otherwise this gift of grace from the Father will be left unused, unrealized, wasted. If we respond positively to God’s call it then becomes a grace of cooperation. God assists our faith along the way but on our part we must respond. – Call and Response – .

Last week, we spoke of how so many of our Catholic brothers and sisters no longer come to Mass. At the heart of this reality is a lack of faith in our Lord’s real presence in the Eucharist. Why this lack of faith in our Lord’s real presence? Is God the Father not drawing them to this faith? Is he not providing them with the necessary preeminent graces to assist them in their faith? Of course, He is. The

Father calls all souls to faith in His Son Jesus. But the other part of the equation is missing. He calls but are people responding?

A failure to respond to the Father's call can have a number of causes. The Church speaks of the proper disposition of the soul. In other words, for the soul to hear God's call to faith it must be prepared, properly disposed to hear God.

- The presence of serious sin can drastically hamper a soul's ability to hear God – much less respond. Some people are very attached to their serious sins and do not want to give them up, and in so doing block preeminent grace and the call to faith – especially faith in as deep a mystery as the Holy Eucharist. The remedy in this case is confession and a conversion back to God.
- Another very serious condition that inhibits preeminent grace is acedia. The condition of acedia exists when a person is lazy and just doesn't care about matters of religion. Another name for this is sloth. Preparing the soul to be properly disposed to hearing God's call to faith requires effort and too many of our people are just too lazy to put forth the effort. Laziness is one of the principal tactics of the devil. He knows how effective it is in sapping the faith life out of a person. The presence of serious sin and acedia is often the reason some Catholics leave the Catholic faith for other religions (these tend to be easier).
- Another condition that inhibits God's call to faith in the real presence in the Holy Eucharist is human pride and human respect. This condition often exists among our protestant Christian brothers and sisters. The Father calls all people to faith in the Eucharist, not just Catholics. Many of our protestant brothers and sisters understand the Catholic teaching on the Eucharist, some even believe it, contrary to their own church's teaching about the bread of life. But for pride reasons they refuse to make the transition from protestant Christianity to Roman Catholic Christianity. Other protestant Christians fail to make the transition to Catholicism out of human respect. In other words, they are afraid of what their family and friends might say if they converted to Catholicism. And so, they remain in a faith that does not have the Holy Eucharist, the bread of life, as Jesus proclaimed it to be. This calls to mind the words of Jesus "unless you leave mother, father, sister and brother for my sake you cannot be part of my kingdom." (Lk 14:26-27) In these cases, conversion is not an easy thing, but it is certainly possible by responding to the Father's preeminent grace.

What can a person do to help make themselves more properly disposed to responding to the Father's call? The Eucharist is a mystery that requires supernatural assistance to have faith in it. Science can help but it is certainly no guarantee. A true mystery, which the Holy Eucharist is, cannot be adequately explained by human effort alone. That person who truly wants to believe must open their heart to the Father and be "taught by Him", as Jesus said (Jn 6:45).