

# Reflections on John 6

## Archbishop Naumann - Week 4



### **Deacon Bill Scholl:**

Welcome to Enflaming our Hearts with Eucharistic Amazement by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City and Kansas. A series of reflections on the Gospel of John, as we contemplate our Lord's marvelous gift of Himself through the action of the Mass, as Christ gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. (music)

### **Archbishop Joseph Naumann:**

Dear friends, this is Archbishop Joseph Naumann. Thanks for joining me on these podcasts, as we're reflecting and meditating on the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel – a chapter that's oftentimes called, The Bread of Life discourse. And we're doing this in part as our preparation for this Eucharistic Revival that the bishops of the United States are calling for, as they are calling all Catholics to allow ourselves to renew our faith in the miracle that is the Eucharist. And part of what motivated this pastoral initiative were some studies that showed a lot of Catholics don't believe in the real presence of Jesus.

And if you have difficulty with that, believing in the real presence of Jesus, I encourage you and I say this sometimes to Protestants who don't share our faith in the Eucharist, read the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel. So today we're going to continue. We're going to pick up with Verse 51 and read through 58. And so this is a bridge from our last episode. It reads,

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. And the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world." The Jews quarreled amongst themselves saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day. For 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, just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father. So also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Well friends, as we hear Jesus continue in this discourse and we heard in the previous episode, the Jews were murmuring when Jesus began to speak this way about himself being the living bread that came down from heaven. In today's passage, it says the Jews quarreled among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So it's interesting in that they're quarreling and they're arguing amongst themselves about, how can this be possible?

And then Jesus says, "Amen, amen." And whenever we hear those words where Jesus says, "Amen, amen," he's saying to the people, "This is important. I'm going to say something to you, very important now, you must listen to this. And he says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you." Think about those words. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood," you do not have life within you. This is a powerful statement that Jesus is making and tells us how important the Sacrament of the Eucharist really is.

Now you know, I think, of course, we know that many Christians today don't understand the Eucharist and appreciate it as we do. In God's economy, we trust he can take care of that. But for those of us who've been given this gift, we're called to treasure it and to realize what a miracle of grace that's being given to us. And part of the reason that others may not believe in it is because they're not seeing something very different in the people that are receiving this. So when Jesus comes to us in this way and gives us His flesh and blood, gives us His very self, he's empowering us now to be the Body of Christ in the world.

And you know, it's interesting when you read the gospels in their entirety, you see how this was foreshadowed, even in the birth of Jesus in the city of Bethlehem, where He's born is the City of bread is what Bethlehem means. He's laid in this manger, which is a trough, an eating trough for animals. So this place where animals come to get nourishment. But it's all prefiguring what this teaching of Himself is the bread of life, is this heavenly food that comes to us and is offered to us through the miracle of the Eucharist. And then he begins to say, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. That I will raise him on the last day."

I think, for all human beings, there's a fear of death. I remember recently, I was preaching and afterwards ... It was actually on Ash Wednesday, so it's been a while ago. But the symbolisms of Ash Wednesday, and it's always interesting that it's one of our biggest days for mass attendance, even though it's not a Holy Day of Obligation. But there's something about Ash Wednesday that attracts people and part of it is because the symbolism is so strong about our mortality. You know, many of us try to avoid thinking about that, about thinking about death. But you know what? The saints thought about that all the time.

And one of my favorite saints is St. Thomas Moore and he would meditate on his death every day. And you might say, "Wow. Well, that would make you kind of depressed or morose." But no, Thomas Moore had this great ... He was known for his sense of humor, for his wit, for his joyfulness. And it helped Thomas Moore put his life in perspective, realizing that this world is fleeting. But what Jesus has offered us is to share in His life, which is eternal. And if we believe that, if we accept that, if we embrace that, then that which is the great fear of all humanity of death itself, no longer is a fear for us.

Now that doesn't mean we throw our lives away. We have a responsibility to be stewards of our bodies, to take care of them and not to be reckless in our behavior. But we don't have to be paralyzed by fear of death because we know that actually death is a doorway. It's a gateway that's opening us to this fullness of life that this world can only foreshadow in some ways. And

so Jesus is telling us this, in this passage, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. And so this again, I think, Jesus is saying that if we receive Him in this sacrament in faith, that He remains in us.

And as I said before, this is a great dignity that we have but it's a great responsibility that we become what we receive in the Eucharist. We become the body of Christ. Each time we leave the Eucharist, we're put on a mission to bring Jesus to the world, to make His love present in the world through our lives. That others should be able to see in us, something different about us. They should see the living presence of Jesus alive within us. He goes on to saying this passage, "Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me."

And so Jesus accepted the mission that the Father gave Him to come into the world. And now, as Jesus comes to us and offers His life to us and nourishes us in this Sacrament, we too are being sent out into the world to bring the one that we've received to others. So that we should be an instrument, a vessel, of his love in our families, with our neighbors, with our friends, in our workplace. We've received Jesus Christ in this Sacrament, now we're called to bring Him to all those that we encounter. That others, when they meet us, it should be a way that they're being touched by Jesus Christ in His love through us.

He goes on to say, "This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." And so he's referencing back to the people saying, "Well, Moses gave the people manna." And Jesus corrects them, says, "No, it wasn't Moses that gave this to your ancestors but God who gave it to you." But he says, "But that manna, it was only a temporary thing that they ate it. Yes, it kept them alive but they all died." But he's saying, "What I'm offering to you is something so much more powerful and profound that whoever eats this bread will live forever."

You know, we might ask ourselves, what does it mean to remain in Jesus? How does receiving the Eucharist allow us to remain in Him? His physical body is consumed into ours, but what of our body is given to Him? So if we choose to accept this invitation, to believe his teaching and receive his body, we're given the grace to live out the mission of our Baptism by serving as Christ's body to those around us. So others should see in us, they should experience the Lord's love, but they should see a hope in us and a joy in us. Again, we have the threat, the great human threat of death but we no longer have to be afraid of that.

Yes, we all will go through a dying but we know that's a birth for the believer in Jesus Christ, a belief into a new life. And so in receiving the Eucharist, it's renewing. Every time we receive it, it's nourishing us but it's also renewing the hope of the living Christ in us. And this Christ, again, we know the end of the story, who conquered death, who defeated death by His resurrection on Easter. And so, you and I were given this gift to share in this very life of Jesus Christ, this eternal life. And so how can we ever be without hope and how can we ever be without a capacity for joy?

Even in the direst of circumstances, even in moments of great adversity, it doesn't mean that we don't experience hurt and pain and suffering in our lives and that we're affected by those. But nothing can deprive us of this truth, that Jesus Christ is alive within us. And that, yes, when suffering comes into our lives, it's not something that we would seek out. But when it comes to us, we realize that in some way, the Lord is asking us to unite more closely with Him. That the crucified one, the God who came to us and was willing to suffer on Calvary, that somehow He's inviting us to share in that suffering. And it's at that moment that our witness can become the most powerful.

When everything's going well in life, well yeah, other people without faith, they'd be happy and joyful, as well. But it's really at these times, when great adversity or difficulty comes to us, that it's those moments our witness can be most powerful that we're not without hope. We still believe Jesus is within us and we believe that even our suffering can have meaning if we unite it with the suffering of the crucified One. And that somehow Jesus, He doesn't desire us to suffer but He wants to use our suffering as a way of drawing others to Him. So part of what we can do is we can offer our suffering for others, whatever that suffering might be.

But also part of it is that if we can be these witnesses of joy and hope, even when others know that life is difficult for us, that becomes something that others will be drawn to. What makes him or her so hopeful and joyful because we know what kind of adversity they're experiencing right now? But if we know that we have Jesus, that Jesus has united Himself so intimately with us, that we have this bread of life and He's given us this eternal destiny to live with Him and the saints that these adversities are passing in this world. And in some way, if we remain strong in the faith, they can be the instruments that God wants to use to awaken others, to desire to come to know Jesus Christ.

Awaken others to receive this bread of life and the Eucharist so that they, too, can have this hope and this peace and this joy that can endure even through all of the ups and downs, the difficulties and adversities of this life. So again, as we come to receive the Lord in the Eucharist, the next time we do that, let's let these words really sink in. You know, that Jesus is saying to us, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you won't have life in you. But whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."

And so as we come to approach the Lord in the Sacrament, it's a good time to ask the Lord, "Lord, give me a deeper faith, help me to be open to what you've told us. You will make yourself present to us in this inconspicuous way, if you will. But we have the testimony of Jesus Christ himself, that He will be there and make Himself present to us. So to open our hearts to this amazing miracle in which we're participating." I hope today's reflection has been helpful for you. And that you'll continue, as things are building to a climax now in this sixth chapter of John's Gospel and as we have two more of these podcasts to bring it to conclusion.

But our hope is that in just reflecting on this sixth chapter of John, I encourage you to go read the whole chapter through. You don't have to wait till next week's podcast, but read it prayerfully through and let that teaching absorb you and think about how many would reject this teaching.

Yet, we see how important it was for the early Christians. What a gift is offered to us at each and every mass. And if we understand it, if we understand that Jesus Christ is going to be present, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the Creator of the Cosmos, is offering an invitation for us to come and to be united with Him. What could be more important? What could keep us away from the Eucharist? Thanks for listening and God bless. (music)