

Reflections on John 6

Archbishop Naumann - Week 2



Deacon Bill Scholl:

Welcome to Enflaming Our Hearts with Eucharistic Amazement, by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in 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.

Archbishop Joseph Naumann:

Welcome friends. Thanks for joining this podcast on the Eucharist. This is Archbishop Joseph Naumann, and we're going to continue in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. We're skipping a little bit of the gospel here, and we're going to pick up on verse 24 to 35.

"When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen. Amen. I say to you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him, the Father God has set his seal. So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God that you believed in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat." So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen. I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven. My Father gives you the bread from heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger. And whoever believes in me will never thirst." The Gospel of the Lord.

So friends, we pick up now with verse 24, but just to explain a little bit the beginning of this. It says, "When the crowd saw neither Jesus nor his disciples were there." So they're still in the place where the miracle of the multiplication of loaves happens. They say they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum.

Now what happened in the interlude here, when Jesus saw that they were so impressed by the miracle of the loaves and fish, he retreats. He goes up the mountain and to a place alone. The disciples, meanwhile, they get in the boats to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called the Sea of Tiberius or Lake Gennesaret. It has a lot of names that are used for it in

the Gospel. They're crossing over, but it's one of the episodes where they get kind of caught up in a storm. And Jesus comes walking across the water.

It's an episode, again, that we find in the other Gospels, but this one's a little bit different because all of a sudden, Jesus comes. They welcome him to come into the boat. And like that, they're at the other side. They're jet propelled there, if you will. So that's why the crowd is confused as, how did they get there? And they knew the disciples had left, but Jesus had left with them. So how did Jesus get there? That's what they're interested in. But Jesus says to them, and whenever Jesus says, "Amen, amen," that means he's going to say something important. He's saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you. You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled."

So he's challenging them that they're following him because they think, oh, this is great. We'll never have to work another day. He can just provide this food for us, and all we need to do is have him perform miracle after miracle. But Jesus says, he's letting them know that's not his mission; to be this free meal ticket for them. And he tells them, he says, "Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the son of man will give you." And so he's telling them now, that yes, we have all of these concerns, natural concerns for our physical welfare and the material needs that we have. But the greatest need that we have is not these physical needs, but it's this spiritual need in which we need communion with God, where he's the only thing. We're built to be in communion with God and with our Heavenly Father.

And so Jesus is challenging them to long for that, more than they long for another piece of bread or a loaf of bread. And Jesus then, it's interesting because they begin to say to him, "Well, what sign can you do that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?" Well, this is interesting, isn't it, because he's just worked this amazing miracle, but now they want another sign. And they say, "Our ancestors ate manna in the desert." So they're saying, "Well, Moses provided this heavenly food every day for the people. How about you doing something?" The implication is, "How about you doing that for us? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

And then Jesus, again, he says, "Amen, amen. I say to you, it wasn't Moses who gave you bread from heaven. My Father gives you the true bread from heaven." So he's saying, "Yeah, Moses was a great figure. He was the human instrument that the Lord used in bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and now through the desert to the promised land. But it's not Moses that's doing all these things and working all of these wonders. He's the human instrument that God is really using to provide for his people. And it's God that provides this manna for them as they go through the desert."

And so in this, Jesus is making this comparison between himself, as he'll identify at the end. He says, "It was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven. My Father gives you the bread from heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." And then they say, "Well, give us this bread always." And that this is where Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger. Whoever believes in me, will never

thirst." And this again, gets back to an earlier passage in John's Gospel, the encounter that Jesus has with the Samaritan woman.

If you remember in that episode, Jesus is at this well. He's thirsty. The Samaritan woman comes during noontime. She comes at this time of day that most women are not coming to fetch water, and partially because she's kind of a social outcast because she's living an immoral life at this point. And Jesus asked her to give him something to drink. And she chides him, that as a man and as a Jewish man, he's asking this Samaritan woman to give him something to drink. And Jesus said, "If you knew who you were talking to you, because I can give you this living water."

And again, she says, "Well, give me this, so I don't have to come back every day." And so we see the same kind of dynamic. They're asking, "Well, give us this food, so we don't have to work for food anymore." But in both cases, they're missing what Jesus really wants to provide for them, which is a much more important need, a much more eternal need that we have. And again, that's this communion with God. And so Jesus says to him, he's the sign that they're looking for. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger. And whoever believes in me will never thirst."

So Jesus is telling us that it's he alone that can really satisfy the hungers of our heart. Again, he's not talking here about physical food, although if we are following the Lord, he will help us provide. We have to do as we heard in the Gospel last week, we have to do our part. But the Lord will provide for our needs. But the more important needs that we have is this communion with God. And of course, that's precisely what the Eucharist allows us to be in communion with God. I think about this in terms of the issues that we have with Mass attendance and many people can be like the people in the Gospel today, who are somewhat obtuse to what's being offered to them.

What Jesus is really inviting them to be able to experience and to share in, that he is the living presence of God in their midst. And he's come here to break down the barriers between the Israelites, the Jewish people and God, and to bring them into this relationship again with the Lord. And to fulfill the promises that were really made through the prophets and in the Old Testament for God's people. He's here, present to them right now. And I think of this in terms of some of the attitudes that we find in people today, who look at the Eucharist as something that maybe they'll try and fit in during the weekend, if it's convenient for them.

But that will substitute all sorts of other things and not make coming to the Eucharist a priority. The Church has this Ecclesiastical Law that for a Catholic, we have an obligation to go to the Eucharist every Sunday. Unless there's some reason, could be a health reason, physical reason, unless it's absolutely impossible. But so many look at the Eucharist as, well, it's just one other thing to kind of fit in my schedule. And we'll see if it works with the Chief's football schedule, if it works with taking my kids with their travel soccer team. Whether it's convenient or if I stay out late Saturday and just don't feel like getting up on Sunday.

And this shows a total lack of awareness of what is being offered to us every time that we go to the Eucharist. If we understand what Jesus is providing in the Eucharist, what could possibly be more important to us and what could possibly keep us away from coming to encounter God? The living presence of God, that in the Eucharist is present to us. The one who made the universe and the cosmos, the one who's given us the very gift of life itself. And it's this that's being offered to us each and every Sunday. And again, to think what could possibly be more important than being able to come and receive Jesus, to receive the living presence of God?

We've been blessed through our baptism to be given the very life of God. We've been made into these temples of the Holy Spirit. We become, if you will, these living tabernacles that carry God within us. And baptism is the most important event in all of our lives. There's nothing more significant that will ever happen to us, than does at baptism. But that life of the Lord that's been given to us, it needs to be nourished. It needs to be replenished. And so he gives us so many of the sacraments or one time experiences, like baptism and confirmation and the sacraments of Holy Orders or for married couples of marriage.

But the Eucharist is one of those sacraments that the Lord gives us to nourish us on our journey through this life. And it is similar to the manna in the Old Testament, that the manna was the physical food that was provided to the people of Israel as they journeyed to the promised land. The Eucharist is this food for us, as we make our journey through this world to the ultimate promised land to heaven. And so we need this spiritual nourishment. We need to take advantage of this. It's beautiful to see how many people actually come to daily Mass. They really understand this. They understand that the Eucharist is something that we would never want to abstain ourselves from the opportunity to receiving.

And you see this in some of the accounts of people that are in prison camps or concentration camps. At times, we see this particular in the books of Father Walter Ciszek, who was this Jesuit priest that was captured right at the beginning of the second World War by the Russians. He had been sent to be a missionary to the Russian people, and he's put in concentration camps. Well, while he's in for decades, he's in concentration camps in these very adverse circumstances. But he finds the elements to be able to celebrate the Eucharist and his fellow prisoners, he'll celebrate a Mass in the morning, but most of them won't be able to come to it.

And back then, you would fast, not just an hour before Mass, but you'd fast from midnight until whenever you could receive the Eucharist. And these men would fast the entire day, even while they're doing this hard grueling work, just to be able to receive the Lord in the Eucharist. And might we have that hunger and that appreciation for the Eucharist as well, that it's more essential to us than physical food. It is this great gift that the Lord gives us. And every time we come to it, it's a miracle that God is making himself present to us again, and is feeding us with his very self. Is renewing and nourishing the life, his life within us, that was given to us in the waters of baptism.

So let us never absent ourselves from receiving this bread from heaven. Let us never allow ourselves or choose to separate ourselves from the gift of this blessed sacrament. And when we

receive it in faith and we bring to the Lord, whatever is happening in our life at that time, he will bring strength. He'll bring peace, even in the midst of some of the things that are causing anxiety in our hearts. He'll bring us all that we need to be able to fulfill whatever the responsibilities our mission needs entrusted to us.

Let us pray that we might have a deeper, more profound appreciation for the gift of the Eucharist. And let's pray for our fellow Catholics that we never take this for granted. We never willingly separate ourselves from receiving this most precious gift, that we don't squeeze the Eucharist in on the weekend, but we make the Eucharist the center of every Sunday. Or if we go to the vigil Mass Saturday night, but we make it the center of our Sunday experience and we build everything else around it. And it's more important than any other activity we might do that day. Thanks for listening and God bless. (music)