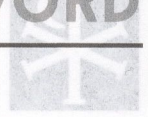


Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58



Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 18, 2024

LECTONARY #128
Proverbs 9:1-6
Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58



REFLECTION

When we read today's Gospel passage, we hear an invitation to and a promise of eternal life from Jesus. Yet, the way this is offered is startling: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (John 6:54). This type of graphic language is used many times throughout this reading. For those hearing it for the first time as Jesus spoke, these words must have been shocking and scandalous. They had witnessed several miracles that demonstrated Jesus' identity, but the directive to eat flesh and drink blood had them fighting amongst themselves at the meaning of this difficult teaching. Instead of clarifying, Jesus keeps repeating himself and offering the promise of eternal life with God. Jesus meant what he said.

We, and the early Christian community John was writing his Gospel for, have the benefit of knowing that Jesus gave us his flesh and blood in the gift of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. As Catholics, we believe Jesus at his word: in the Eucharist we are consuming the Real Presence of Christ—Body, Blood, soul, and divinity.

ACTION

This week, spend some time researching what Catholics believe about the Eucharist. A great place to start is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 1322-1419 (<https://ltp.org/s/catechism-eucharist>). As you research, write down any questions that you have about what the Church teaches. Are there words you don't understand? Practices you aren't familiar with? Anything else? Take these questions to your youth minister or religion teacher. Learning more about Church teaching will help you grow in your faith, come to a deeper relationship with Christ, and be better equipped to share the faith with others.



Watch the Thomistic Institute's explanation of St. Thomas Aquinas' description of transubstantiation. <https://youtu.be/93lauv161ks>

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What questions do you have about the Church's teaching on the Eucharist?
- ❖ How do you experience Christ's presence in your life through the Eucharist?



August 18, 2024

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #119B

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalms 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

This week we continue reading the Bread of Life discourse found in John 6. Jesus continues to give explanations about his startling words, that he is the Bread of Life, that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, that this is the way to eternal life. The crowds continue to struggle to understand. Today, we face similar challenges, as many Catholics struggle to understand the Church's teaching on Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. Today's reflection will help the teens understand what the Church teaches and how it is a matter of faith. To help you prepare this topic, you can watch the video suggested on page 13.

Q FOCUS: *Through faith, we believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This week in the liturgical year is filled with inspiring saints and wonderful feast days. Some of these celebrations include St. Bernard of Clairvaux on August 20, St. Pius X on August 21, the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 22, and St. Rose of Lima on August 23. As a group, choose one of these to research to learn how that saint or celebration exemplifies a life of faith and trust in God.

Church Teaching Connection

"At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he should come again and in this way to entrust to his beloved Bride, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection. . . . The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred service conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement" (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 47-48).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:51-58

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to the crowds: "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 among 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."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The reception of the Eucharist is central to the Catholic faith, yet it is surrounded by mystery. It should not be surprising to us today that many people are confused about the Eucharist. Even in Jesus' day, those who followed him did not understand what he was telling them about the gift of himself that we hear described in today's Gospel passage: "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."

► **What would you ask Jesus if you were listening to him speak the words of this Gospel reading for the first time?**

► **What questions do you have about the gift Jesus gives us today in the Eucharist?**

St. Thomas Aquinas described the change that occurs to the bread and wine during Mass as transubstantiation. What we see as bread and wine are

no longer bread and wine, even if they look like it on the outside, but are instead the Body and Blood of Christ. While all the details of St. Thomas' explanation are an important part of our Catholic theological tradition, there are too many to go into at this time. If you haven't watched the video suggested on this Sunday's "Living the Word" handout, I suggest you check it out to learn more about transubstantiation. In short, what happens is that during Mass, ordinary bread and wine are brought to the altar and offered to God. By divine power and grace, the substance of the bread and wine is changed to God's very essence. While the visible parts look like bread and wine, their nature has changed. That ordinary bread is now the Bread of Life, the gift of Jesus' own self given to us for our salvation. We don't receive a symbol of Jesus, but Jesus himself. How does this happen? It is a mystery.

► **When you are faced with learning about or understanding a difficult concept, how do you approach the task? How do you come to achieve a better understanding?**

Explaining this important and essential mystery of our faith to someone is challenging. It is hard to grasp what God is doing. We may need to repeat ourselves several times and focus on different ways of explaining the concept. That is what we hear Jesus doing with the crowd when he explains that he is the Bread of Life come down from heaven. It is too mysterious for them to understand. What does he mean that he is the Bread of Life? Does he actually want us to eat his flesh and drink his blood? Is he speaking symbolically? What is he talking about?

If Jesus were speaking symbolically, he would have said so; it would have been much easier. The confusion of the crowd shows how complex and important this matter is. If you eat the flesh of Jesus, you will live forever. Without it, you will die.

In the end, this is a matter of faith. We cannot understand everything that God does, but we can (and should!) trust in his words and in his actions. He is faithful, he is merciful, and he is love. Out of love, Jesus gives us the gift of himself. In the Eucharist, we have the opportunity to receive God. There is no way to be closer to Jesus than this. As we consume the Eucharist, we become united with him, and he dwells in us.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 14.

Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist.

Out of love, Jesus gives himself as a gift in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the way to eternal life.

Act on the Word

Carlos Acutis and Eucharistic Miracles

For this activity, you will need several computers, tablets, or smartphones with internet access that the teens can use to do research.

Tell the young people about Blessed Carlos Acutis (1991–2006), who is currently on the path to sainthood in the Catholic Church. He was a young man with a heart for God and a particular devotion to Eucharistic miracles. Born in London and raised in Milan, Carlos grew up as a faithful Catholic. After receiving his first Communion at seven years old, he went to Mass and received the Eucharist regularly. He loved the saints and sought to be like them.

A Millennial, Carlos grew up in the age of computers. Combining his love for computers and his Catholic faith, he created a website cataloguing every Eucharistic miracle around the world. He wanted to use technology to help others know about God's friendship. His other interests included playing soccer, watching movies, playing video games, and volunteering his time with those experiencing poverty.

Carlos died from leukemia when he was just fifteen years old. Since that time, many have championed his cause for canonization (the process of becoming a saint). He is not a saint yet, but he was beatified (the second stage in the process) in 2020.

For today's activity, the teens will be exploring the website Carlos designed, <http://www.miracoli-eucaristici.org/en/liste/list.html>. Break the young people into small groups and have each group select one or two miracles from the website. After a period of research, allow each group to share their findings. Make sure they mention the location, date, and details of the Eucharistic miracle.

After all groups have presented, invite the young people to share any inspirations and questions they have after learning about Blessed Carlos Acutis. If there is time, you can finish the activity by spending a few minutes in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Closing Prayer

*Loving God,
you fed the Israelites
on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land,
and you sent your Son
to be our food for the journey of life.*

*May we be ever grateful for your gracious care
and never cease to praise you.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with