

This is the time of the year when Bread for the World sends out its annual appeal. Some churches set aside a Sunday each year to collect an offering for this cause. Bread for the World is a worthy organization. They have a new motto: “Have faith. End hunger.” I thought about that for a few moments, while at the same time reflecting on Jn 6:35: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE; WHOEVER COMES TO ME SHALL NOT HUNGER AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME SHALL NEVER THIRST. Bread for the World exists as an ongoing effort to end hunger as do many other organizations. Locally there is The Masters Table and the Jackson House and Harvey’s Chapel, for which we collect non-perishable food items on an ongoing basis.

Tomorrow, August 10, is St. Lawrence Day. He was the church in Roman when the procurator or policeman came to the church and demanded that Lawrence hand over the treasurers of the church. He demanded that by noon the next day the gold vessels, the golden candle stands, etc., be turned over to him or Lawrence would die. The next day he returned to find the church filled with the poor and needy people. These were, said Lawrence, the treasurers of the church for which the golden vessels had been sold. The procurator did not find it at all humorous and commanded that Lawrence be tried to an iron grate and placed over an open fire. At one point Lawrence said, “I’m done on this side you can turn be over now.” Hence he is known as the “saint with a sense of humor.”

Jesus calls Himself “the bread of life,” given “for the life of the world.” Jesus says in the text that those who come to Him will never hunger (v 35). John 6 presents Jesus as the true and satisfying bread given for the life of the world. That means every Sunday is a Bread for the World Sunday. Every week, every day,

CHRIST PROVIDES THE BREAD OF LIFE FOR THE WORLD.

I.

The Bible is filled with references to bread, food, nourishment, and so forth. The most obvious example is the one Jesus refers to in v 49: “**Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.**” Many places in the Old Testament refer to food and drink and hospitality offered at meals. From “**a land flowing with milk and honey**” (Ex 3:8) to the “**give us this day our daily bread**” of the Lord’s Prayer, the Bible has a lot to say about food and daily sustenance.

Not only did God provide manna for the Israelites in their journey in the wilderness, but He also provided careful instructions to His people regarding proper eating and diet and laws regarding the same (Leviticus 11). One writer said that Luke’s Gospel provides at least nine examples of Jesus teaching the Gospel in the context of food and table fellowship:

- Levi invites friends to his home for a dinner party at which they can meet Jesus (Lk 5:27-32)
- Jesus and his disciples eat grain from the fields as they walked on the Sabbath (Lk 6:1-6)
- A Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner at which a woman anointed Jesus feet with oil (Lk 7:36-50)
- Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter after which he tells them to give her something to eat (Lk 8:55)
- Jesus fed the 5,000 (Lk 9:10ff)
- Jesus told the 72 missionary disciples to eat whatever was put before them (Lk 10:8)

When Jesus visited their home, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him, while Martha was overly concerned with dinner preparation (Lk 10:38-42)

After telling the parable of the rich foolish farmer Jesus said, "Don't worry about what you are going to eat."

In Lk 12:42 the master appoints a wise manager to give the servants food at the proper time.

In Lk 14 Jesus told the story of the wedding feast.

After the prodigal son returns his father throws a banquet for him. (Lk 15:11ff)

Jesus led His disciples in celebrating the Passover, at which time He instituted the Lord's Supper.

Jesus revealed Himself to the two Emmaus disciples as when He broke bread with them. (Lk 24:30-31)

And after His resurrection Jesus appeared to them and ate a piece of broiled fish to prove that it was indeed Him – in the flesh (Lk 24:40-42)

THAT MAKES AT LEAST 12 REFERENCES TO EATING OR FOOD IN THE BOOK OF LUKE and if you count the large herd of pigs feeding on a hillside in Lk 8:32 you have a baker's dozen.

The question is not how many times does the Bible refer to food, but where does the Bible *NOT* speak of food? The answer is, not very often. But more important, and to the point of John 6, what does Jesus mean when He refers to Himself as "the bread of life"?

II.

New Testament scholars have long debated and discussed among one another whether or not John 6 is a communion text. I am not going to try to solve this problem except only to say it's not to hear this text without thinking of Holy Communion. But there is a question regarding John 6 that needs to be raised. The first three Gospels depict Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper in the context of His death through the shedding of His blood on the cross the very next day. Paul's references to the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10–11 parallel the first three Gospels by connecting Jesus' death to Holy Communion and to Jesus' second coming with these words: "**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes**" (1 Cor 11:26). The late Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown points out that this poses at least one difficulty, or raises an interesting question: "Is Holy Communion so attached to Jesus' death that it is unrelated to what He did earlier during His public ministry?" Jesus' language here in John 6 provides an answer to this question. Just as Israel was sustained on a daily basis by partaking of the manna in the wilderness (Ex 16:35), Jesus points to Himself as the bread of life—an interesting contrast to the association of the Lord's Supper with His death. Furthermore, this Bread – Jesus - is associated with and connected to everyday life. O how we need the Bread of Life to sustain us physically and emotionally as we journey through life!

This also is obvious in the Old Testament reading for this morning. In 1 Kings 19, after slaying the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel, Elijah finds himself having to flee from wicked Queen Jezebel. As he literally runs for his life, the text tells us that he wanted to die (19:4): "IT IS ENOUGH; NOW, O LORD, TAKE AWAY MY LIFE." But instead of permitting this, God sends an angel that immediately invites Elijah to arise and eat and drink. Elijah eats but in his

depression, falls asleep again, rises, and the angel invites him to eat a second time (vv 5–8). God was right there for Elijah—to nourish, sustain, and protect him from the murderous queen.

Another problem is the **issue of unbelief**. Many times in the Gospels, Jesus is being opposed by the religious leaders. Surprisingly in John 6, His words are directed to the struggles and unbelief of His own disciples (vv 36, 60), as well as “the Jews” (v 52). As a result, many abandoned Jesus, not because they didn’t believe He was referring to himself as the bread of life and that the literal eating and drinking would provide ultimate satisfaction for one’s hunger and thirst, but precisely because they *did* understand that that He was referring to Himself and what He meant, but they didn’t believe it and turned away.

There are many today who seek spiritual nourishment apart from Jesus Christ precisely because they don’t believe in Jesus when He presents Himself to us and tells us He’s “the Bread of Life” (vv 35, 48). The Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood is available to us today even as it was to the disciples and those who heard Jesus speak these words. But these words are rejected by many now as they were then. His words are still very much “a hard saying” (Jn 6:60). Instead of believing that Jesus is the bread of life and that He nourishes the Church and individual Christians through the Sacrament of His body and blood, many look for more exciting and dynamic ways of being spiritual. There are numerous sects and cults that do not believe the Lord’s Supper brings the true presence of Jesus’ Body and Blood.

III.

John’s Gospel calls unbelievers to a confession of faith. In Jn 20:31, Jesus says, “**But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**”

Elijah trusted God in the wilderness; Israel relied on the promises of God in order to reach the Promised Land; the disciples who did not abandon Jesus cried out, “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life**” (Jn 6:68). So also it is today. Jesus presents Himself to an unbelieving world as the Bread of Life and as the very life of the world. Organizations like Bread for the World provide food to sustain the body in this world. The more important and most vital mission of the Church is to continue to communicate to a dying world that here is a bread and a drink that will bring new and eternal life. This bread and this drink is Jesus Himself, who is present as He has told us He is: “**I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. IF ANYONE EATS OF THIS BREAD, HE WILL LIVE FOREVER. AND THE BREAD THAT I WILL GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS MY FLESH.**”

1. Arthur A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993]).

2. Raymond E. Brown, *A Once-and-Coming Spirit at Pentecost* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994], 39).