

Friday of the Third Week of Easter

Gospel text (Jn 6:52-59): 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.” These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

“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.”

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Today, Jesus makes three key avowals: we are to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood; if we do not take the Holy Communion we cannot have life; and this life is the eternal life and the condition for resurrection (cf. Jn 6:53-58). There is nothing in the Gospel so clear, so emphatic and so definite as these statements of Jesus.

We Catholics are not always up to the level the Eucharist requires: at times, we try “to live” without the living conditions set up by Jesus and, yet, as Saint John Paul II has written “Eucharist is too big a gift to admit any ambiguities and reductions.”

“Eat to live”: to eat the flesh of the Son of Man is to live as the Son of Man. This food is called “communion”. It is “food”, and we say “food” so that there is no

doubt with respect to its assimilation, to its identification with Jesus. We receive Holy Communion to remain united: to think like Him, to speak like Him, to love like Him. We Christians were missing John Paul II's Eucharistic Encyclical, *The Church lives from the Eucharist*. It is a passionate encyclical: it is “fire” because the Eucharist is ardent.

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15), Jesus was saying that evening of the Holy Thursday. We have to recover the Eucharistic fervor. No other religion has a similar initiative. It is God Himself who descends to man's heart to establish a mysterious love relationship. And as of that point the Church is built and participates in the Eucharist apostolic dynamism and ecclesial mission.

We are actually digging into the mystery, as Thomas did when he was touching the wounds of Christ resurrected. We Christians should revise our fidelity to the Eucharistic fact just as Jesus Christ has revealed it and the Church proposes it to us. And we should live once more the “tenderness” towards the Eucharist: a well-made and slow genuflection, and an increase in the number of spiritual communions... And, starting from the Eucharist, men will appear sacred, as they indeed are. And we shall serve them with renewed tenderness.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“Creator and Lord of all things, whatever their nature, he brought forth bread from the earth and changed it into his own body. Not only had he the power to do this, but he had promised it; and, as he had changed water into wine, he also changed wine into his own blood. It is the Lord's Passover.” (Saint Gaudentius of Brescia)

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“The Eucharist remains a ‘sign of contradiction’ and can only be so because a God who makes himself flesh and sacrifices himself for the life of the world throws human wisdom into crisis.” (Benedict XVI)

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“The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the

Eucharist: 'Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (Jn 6:53)." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N° 1384)