

Here are a couple of life's mysteries to ponder this week.

--If a parsley farmer is sued, can they garnish his wages?

--Would a fly without wings be called a walk?

--Why do they lock gas station toilets? Are they afraid someone will break in and clean them?

OK, let's do a bit of Eucharistic theology based on our Johannine text. As is typical for John's gospel, it's loaded and multi-layered. We enter the text after Jesus has told the people that the manna from heaven was a sign of Christ Himself. He miraculously gives eternal life to our souls as the manna miraculously gave physical life to the Israelites' bodies. Thus, He says in today's 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." Ordinary bread sustains our ordinary natural life by giving us its own vegetable life as wheat. A basic law of science is the law of cause and effect: the effect cannot exceed the cause; nothing can give what it does not have. Thus, stones cannot give life, but bread can – it has what is needed to nourish life. And Christ can give eternal life, supernatural life, divine life, to both souls and bodies, because He has it. That's why the dogma of Christ's divinity is absolutely essential: if Jesus is just a man, even a perfect man, He can only give human life, which is temporal and mortal and comes to an end; but if He is divine, He can give divine life, which is immortal and eternal.

There are 2 Greek words for 'life.' One, BIOS, means natural, mortal life. The other, ZOE, means supernatural, eternal life. That's the word Christ uses here. When we receive Christ in the Eucharist, our BIOS (natural life) changes into ZOE (eternal life), just as in the Eucharist the bread and wine miraculously change into Christ's Body and Blood. It is as miraculous as a frog changing into a prince in the fairy tales. It is like Pinocchio changing from a wooden puppet to a living boy. At the very heart and essence of Christianity is this astonishing miracle of bread and wine made Body & Blood.

It's not just a symbol. The great Catholic novelist Flannery O'Connor was once at a fashionable dinner party in New York City, and the fashionable people were saying fashionable things, and one of them said something fashionable like this: "Flannery, I admire some things about your Catholic faith. For instance, the Eucharist: 'This is my Body.' That's a beautiful symbol. But of course you don't take that literally?" Flannery shocked them with her reply: "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it." In His discourse about the Eucharist, Jesus tried to make sure we would not interpret His language only symbolically when He prefaced His shocking remarks with "Amen, amen, I say to you," which is rabbinic formula for "Don't take this merely symbolically; take it literally, in the strongest possible sense." Even the words He uses are crude, barnyard words: "He who GNAWS, CHEWS on my flesh and SLURPS my blood remains in me and I in them." He adds "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."

HOW can He give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink? That's the objection His followers had in the Gospel: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" It sounds shocking because eating His body sounds like cannibalism and drinking His blood sounds like something out of a vampire movie. It also sounded sacrilegious to the Jews because the Jews were forbidden to eat even animal blood. All the blood had to be drained from the animal before it was allowed to be eaten.

The 2 answers to the question 'how' are both divine actions, which are far beyond human power: first what Christ did on the cross once for all, and then what He continues to do in the Eucharist -- to most truly

and really and concretely connect us with what He gave us on the cross – His own body and blood. First He gave us His body collectively, to the whole human race, when He died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world; and second individually, when we receive Him in the sacraments, most especially and most totally in the Eucharist, which He Himself established at the Last Supper. It is the same Body. He has only one.

The reason the Eucharist gives us eternal life is because it gives us Christ Himself, and Christ alone gives eternal life because of the law of cause and effect; you can't give what you don't have. Jesus says, "The one who feeds on me will have life, ZOE (that is – eternal life) BECAUSE OF ME." That life is really in us because it is really in Him, and we really eat Him, and 'You are what you eat.' Christ is really present in the Christian because He is really present in the Eucharist that is really present in the Christian.

As the Catechism says, God can also work outside His sacraments, so those who do not receive the Eucharist can also be saved. But this is the real deal, the whole enchilada, the 12-course banquet compared to which everything else is a TV dinner. (taken from and slightly adapted from – Peter Kreeft, FOOD FOR THE SOUL, p. 771-773)

OK, I know that's a bit classroomish, but it's important that we understand what we're dealing with here. We are partaking of the great love of God, poured out by Christ on the cross, and continuously poured on us every time we receive the Eucharist. But my second of only 2 points (you're welcome!) perhaps can pull this back down to our everyday reality. It's there in our first reading from Deuteronomy. REMEMBER. Moses was reminding the Israelites that they needed to remember what God had done for them in the desert -- the crossing of the red sea, the quail and the manna, the water from the rock, the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. REMEMBER – I have been with you. Always.

But we so easily forget. Despite all our devices to help us remember, we still forget. Things we have every intention of doing sometimes slip through the cracks. Our calendars are crammed; list after list dictates our days.

It's one thing to forget to pick up milk on the way home or to send a birthday card to a family member. But what's troubling is when our forgetting leads to fear: Fear that our forgetting has hurt someone; fear that our forgetting has diminished a relationship; fear that our forgetting has reduced us to a machine that exists only to perform task after task after task; fear that we're losing control.

Yet what defines us as a people of faith is our remembering: remembering that God is in our midst, especially in the Eucharist, remembering the spirit of Jesus' Gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation, remembering to make places for others in our hearts and at our tables.

But we live busy lives – and we forget stuff. The demanding responsibilities of being parents and professionals and workers and students and teammates and fellow choristers-on-tour and homeowners overwhelm us. The day's 'to do' list pushes some plans off our radar screen completely. The roads we travel every day are littered with things we forgot to do: forgetting to express gratitude for a good deed done for us, forgetting to say "I love you" to the beloved we sometimes take for granted, forgetting to apologize to someone, forgetting to speak with God in prayer.....for forgetting.

Sometimes it's not that we forget but that we're overwhelmed with remembering everything important to us.

Our presence here each week is about remembering. We come here to the table of the Lord to remember as Christ asked us to remember Him. Oh, we may come dragging a long list of things to do,

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problems to figure out, hurts to mend; we come troubled and anxious about the events of the past week and the week ahead; we come too distracted to engage in the prayers or take anything away from that blithering old idiot's homily. And that's ok. WHO SAID THAT? IT'S NOT OK! YOU SHOULD BE INSPIRED! AND IF YOU'RE NOT INSPIRED -- THEN I'LL JUST KEEP PREACHING UNTIL YOU GET INSPIRED!

In this bread we bless, break and share, we remember what Jesus did – and why. We remember that we can have hope in the most trying times because of the reality of the resurrection. And, if only for the moment, we remember that God is here, that He is always with us, that He forever blesses our lives, that we can move beyond fear.

And forgetfulness.

Today's feast of Corpus Christi – and every Sunday Mass – calls us together – to remember. Remember Jesus the teacher, Jesus the healer, Jesus the worker of wonders, Jesus the washer of feet, Jesus who loves us one and all down to our holy toes. Barbara Brown Taylor writes: "Most of us do not live especially holy lives, after all. We spend most of our times sitting in traffic, paying bills, and being irritated with one another. Yet every week we are invited to stop all of that for one hour at least. We are invited to participate in a great drama that has been going on without us for thousands of years, and one that will go on as long as there is a single player left standing."

In this bit of bread and sip of wine, we are feasted and gifted with Christ's Body and Blood, and we remember the love of God that became human and real for us – and we ask God to help us remember that love, despite all the things demanding a shard of our memory. REMEMBER. You are loved. God loves you. You are loved. God loves you. AMEN. (2nd point adapted from CONNECTIONS, June 11, 2023, p. 3-4)