

## Sermon for August 30, 2015

John 6:41-51 (NIV84)

<sup>41</sup> At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. <sup>44</sup> "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Dear Fellow Christians!

Jesus' conversation with the Jews in our text took place following his miraculous feeding of a crowd of some 5,000 hungry men plus the women and children who were present. He fed them with 5 small barley loaves and two small fish that a boy had brought with him. This miracle, like all the others Jesus did, was a sign. It pointed to Jesus as the Son of God and the provider of all our earthly needs. It revealed his love and compassion. And because the people had followed Jesus to a remote place to hear his Word, this miracle also demonstrated the truth of his promise, "Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well." (Mt 6:33).

But the people turned it around. To them, the miracle was a sign that Jesus should be their bread-king. This was the kind of Messiah they could use: one who would fill their stomachs with food that multiplied in his hands, so they wouldn't have to work anymore. They missed the point completely. The lesson was to be the same that God taught their forefathers in the desert when he caused them to be hungry and then miraculously fed them with manna, namely that "man does *not* live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3)

When they found Jesus the next day, Jesus told them, "Don't work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (Jn 6:27). This "work," he explained, was to believe in him, whom God the Father had sent into the world (v. 29). But their minds were stuck on earthly food, so Jesus told them in plain words, "The Bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. ... I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day" (Jn 6:33, 35, 40).

**Jesus is the Bread of Life.** This great truth is still rejected by many who hear it. But it is the

truth taught by God, and those who do believe it — those who eat this bread — will live forever.

The Jews refused to believe that Jesus is the Bread of Life. When they heard what he was saying, they *"began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'"* <sup>42</sup> They said, *"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"* They grumbled, because this ordinary man, from an insignificant little town in Galilee, was claiming that God was his father, and that he was sent by God from heaven down to earth to *be* the Bread of Life, to give life to the world! They didn't accept what Jesus was saying about himself. After all, they knew his father, Joseph the carpenter, and his mother Mary. So how could he say, *"I came down from heaven,"* since his parents were known? Undeniably, he was good at doing miracles — and they especially liked the most recent one! — but to call God his father and to say that he had come from heaven and was the Bread of Life, – well, that was making himself equal with God. It was blasphemous.

Obviously, they didn't know about the circumstances of Jesus' conception and birth. But even if they had, would it have made a difference? Would anyone have believed Jesus if he had told them he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that his mother was a virgin when she gave birth to him, and that Joseph was Jesus' foster father, not his biological father?

Jesus' birth of a virgin continues to be a stumbling block to human reason. It's unscientific. A virgin can't become pregnant without the involvement of a man. It just doesn't happen. And saying that God's Son was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the virgin's womb only compounds the difficulty. How could the infinite God possibly live in a human body?

But there is a deeper reason why people reject Jesus as the Bread of Life. It's the same reason the Jews rejected him: their minds were on earthly things. The Jews thought Jesus would make a wonderful bread-king for them — not the Bread of Life who would give his flesh for the life of the world by dying on the cross for the sin of the world, but a king who would give them everything they wanted in this life, provide instant relief from all suffering and illness, and would restore Israel to the glory it once had among the nations. They didn't need a Savior coming from heaven; an earthly Messiah would do just fine.

Today, too, people are willing to see in Jesus a man who was a great teacher and example who preached love and peace and unity, and who taught sharing and social justice; but not the Bread of Life who came down from heaven to give real life to the world by his death and resurrection. Their minds are on earthly things. Bottom line: they don't want to admit that they are lost sinners, doomed to hell and desperately in need of salvation. Both their sinful reason and their enmity against God make it impossible for them to see in Jesus the Bread of Life – *their* Bread of Life.

Jesus saw knew why the Jews were grumbling about him. *"Stop grumbling among yourselves,"* he said. With their grumbling they were just entrenching themselves in their unbelief. With great patience he revealed to them the remedy for their unbelief. *"Stop grumbling– and listen to me!"* Jesus was saying, in effect.

What was he saying? <sup>44</sup> *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."* Jesus knew that nobody, by his own decision or will,

can come to him, see him as the Bread of Life and believe in him. He knows what is in a man. We are defiant enemies of God by nature – dead in our transgressions and sins, and under the control of Satan.

But God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (Jn 3:17), and so the Father draws sinners who by nature are enemies, to come to Christ, to see him as the Bread of Life, their Savior, and to believe in him. On the Last Day, when Jesus returns in glory and the dead are raised, those the Father has drawn to him will be raised to eternal life.

How does the Father "draw" sinners to his Son? Jesus tells us: <sup>45</sup> *"It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."* God does not force anyone to come to his Son—to believe in him. He "draws" sinners to Jesus — by teaching them. "All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace" (Is 54:13), Isaiah wrote.

But how does God do that? How does he teach sinners and draw them to Jesus? He inspired men – prophets in the Old Testament, and apostles and evangelists in the New Testament – to speak his Word. He gives his Church evangelists, pastors and teachers, to teach that inspired Word of the Prophets and Apostles. He has given us his Word, the Bible, which testifies of Jesus—tells us who he is, how he loves us, what he has done for us, how he saved us. In all this it is God who is teaching us. He teaches us through his Son and Holy Spirit—through his Word, the Bible.

At that very moment, God was teaching them through the words of Jesus. <sup>46</sup> *"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God, Jesus told the Jews; only he has seen the Father."* He was teaching them about his relationship with God the Father – that he was the Son of the Father, that he had come from God to be the Bread of Life — to save them!

Only Jesus, the holy Son of God who was God and was with God from eternity has seen the Father. He speaks the words the Father gives him. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" he asked his disciples. "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (Jn 14:10). Oh, listen to Jesus, dear friends! God is teaching us through him, just as he taught the Jews. His teaching draws us to him. But if we don't listen to his teaching, how can the Father draw us to him? Listen to the Father speaking through the Son and Spirit in the Word! Listen, and learn from God himself. Then you will keep coming to Jesus, the Bread of Life, drawn by the Father's teaching.

God's teaching works faith in the hearts of sinners — faith that receives Jesus as the Bread of Life.

<sup>47</sup> *I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life, Jesus says, in plain speech and without metaphor. This is what the Father is teaching through his Son. Eat the Bread of Life! Believe in Jesus, the Source and Giver of true life that lasts through all eternity. The benefits of this spiritual eating are infinitely greater than those of physical eating. <sup>49</sup> *"Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died,"* He tells the Jews. Manna was also a bread from heaven. For forty years, God daily, miraculously, provided manna to nourish the Israelites in the desert and to keep them alive. But although it miraculously appeared every morning, it was an earthly food, like the loaves and fish. It didn't keep the Israelites alive*

forever. All who ate the manna eventually died.

<sup>50</sup> *"But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die,"* Jesus says, and I can imagine him pointing to himself as he says this. He goes on: <sup>51</sup> *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."* Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). This living bread from heaven is for everyone, offered freely — no strings attached! In Isaiah 55, the Lord calls to all who hunger and thirst for salvation, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live!" (Is 55:1-3).

To eat Jesus, the Bread of Life, is to believe in Him, in who he is and what he has done to win forgiveness of sins and eternal life for unworthy sinners like us. How did Jesus become the Source of eternal life for us? *"This bread is my flesh,"* he says, *"which I will give for the life of the world."* The Son of God become flesh, was made man, to win our salvation. As a true man, he became our Brother and Substitute, taking our place under God's law and fulfilling it in perfect love for us, who did not and could not keep it. And then, as a true man, he offered himself up on the cross for the life of the world, the guiltless for the guilty, suffering and dying in our stead under the wrath of God that our sins deserved. "The Word," the Son of God "was made flesh" (Jn 1:14) to give his flesh for the redemption of the world. His resurrection on the third day is proof that his Father accepted his sacrifice on our behalf.

All who eat this Bread of Life —all who believe in Jesus—have eternal life. Death cannot harm them; they will live forever! Today he offers us his body and blood to eat and to drink in his Holy Supper. Here, too, reason objects and says, "It cannot be!" But God teaches that it is so: that in with and under the bread and wine we eat his body given for us and drink his blood of the covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins. Through this teaching the Father draws us to his Son, and we believe and receive his promise of everlasting life in Jesus, our Living Bread from heaven. Amen.