

## My body and my blood

16 8 09

May the ears which have heard your word  
be deaf to clamour and dispute;  
may the tongues which have sung your praise  
be free from deceit:  
may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love  
shine with the light of hope;  
and may the bodies which have been fed with your body  
be refreshed with the fullness of your life.

My text may be found in today's gospel from John, 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. (6 v53 & 54)

Are you ever uncomfortable about what you read in the Bible? Today's reading from John's gospel may be one such passage.

John chapter 6 begins with his account of 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' and in the last couple of weeks, my sermons have focused on the teaching that has its roots in this miracle. Two weeks ago, we looked at the notion of real bread; last week, we considered what it might mean for Jesus to say 'I am the bread of life'. Today, we shift our focus to the uncomfortable and challenging image that we are

called on somehow and in some sense to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ.

First, to help us understand, there are two things we should appreciate. In their history, during the Exodus from Egypt, the Jews, the Children of Israel, were hungry wandering in the Wilderness. And God fed them. Daily, he fed them with manna from heaven. Thirsty, God gave them water to drink, water which flowed from a rock that Moses struck with his staff. Now, at the time of Jesus, the Jews are hungry and thirsty both in a literal sense because some were so poor but also in a spiritual sense because many were longing for the restoration of the Kingdom and freedom from Roman rule and oppression.

It is in this context that Jesus feeds the people, first with his teaching, then with the miracle of the loaves and fish becoming sufficient temporarily to satisfy the hunger of the crowd. The hungry crowd wants to continue to be fed physically. Jesus wants to feed them spiritually, hence the central image in John chapter 6 of Jesus being the bread of life.

Today, Jesus takes the image a step further with the injunction that we should not only be eating his flesh but we should also be drinking his blood! To a modern ear, on the surface, it sounds like cannibalism; indeed, this was precisely one of the attacks on early Christians – that they indulged in cannibalism as part of their secret rites. But such a literal understanding is not what is intended: it is as we have seen last week, an image to convey a truth. Two things are life-sustaining: food and drink and Jesus is saying that in a profoundly true sense we are now to

be fed by his body and his blood. What feeds us as Christians is not only the body of Christ which was broken on the cross but the body of his teaching which embodies all he stood for and believed in. What satisfies our thirst is the life blood that flowed from him as he bled and died on the cross for us. His blood becomes our life blood as we take on board his teaching.

Of course in the service of Holy Communion we believe that we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ by eating the wafer and drinking the wine. It is a wonderful symbolic act which some Christians interpret literally and others figuratively. But however we understand the real presence of Christ in our communion, this is a fact: Jesus Christ feeds us with his body and his blood and the communion is a constant reminder of this truth.

So this morning, I invite you to go home and reflect on the challenge of what is a potentially uncomfortable image: that we are being called on to draw near with faith to receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for us and his blood which he shed for us and to feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
St Bartholomew's Dinard  
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H: Sermon 20: My body and my blood

