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What Is Eternal Life?
John 6: 41-66
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Last week, the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) started to distribute the third round of stimulus checks to qualified people. It is a part of the Covid-19 economic relief package, aiming to support most Americans who have struggled with economic difficulties brought on by the pandemic and to boost the U.S economy. TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) will distribute food commodities this Wednesday morning to anyone in our county who requests them, especially low-income families and senior citizens. Both of these forms of economic support will be a great help for the recipients of these services.

This concept of providing food for people from all walks of life is helping when we examine today's scripture. The leadup in the first part of John chapter 6 is crucial to our understanding of the second half of this chapter. Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand people, who came to Jesus because they had witnessed the previous miracles He had performed on the sick. (6:2) While the feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17), John's account is unique. After John described how Jesus performed that miracle for five thousand people, (slide 1) John then showed how Jesus made use of this miracle to reveal who He was and what kind of ministry He would be doing for His people, while the other Gospels only objectively focused on describing that miracle itself. In the Gospel of John, His miracle of feeding five thousand people is a catalyst through which Jesus clearly revealed who He and what His ministry would be like. John shows us that there was something monumental and eternal that Jesus would reveal through the miracle of feeding five thousand people.

This morning, I would like all of us to come to know what Jesus was saying through His miracle of feeding five thousand people and apply some challenging messages to our lives.

Let's examine what was going on with Jesus and His followers. Jesus had used five barley loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people with twelve baskets of bread pieces left-over. They must have been both surprised and thrilled to be a part of the miracle Jesus had just performed right before their very eyes. If you had been there among the people, you would have said the same thing as those people did: (slide 2) "*Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.*" (v.14) You must have thought that He was the very person who you had anticipated would come to meet all of your worldly concerns. (At that time, Israel was under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire, and people were anticipating the coming of the Messiah, who would save them.) After experiencing this miracle, (slide 3) they intended to force Jesus to be their king (v.15) in order to make their political dreams come true.

However, Jesus did not respond to their wishes and expectations. Instead, He withdrew to a mountain, then walked on water in the Sea of Galilee and sailed with his disciples to Capernaum. Meanwhile, when the people realized that neither Jesus nor His disciples were still among them, they got into boats, and went to Capernaum searching for Jesus. (v.24) Finally, they found Jesus at Capernaum.

Today's scripture is the dialogue between Jesus and the people who came over to Capernaum. At this time Jesus teaches His followers about Himself and His ministry, using the analogy of being fed.

To begin with, Jesus told them that He knew their real intentions for seeking Him in Capernaum, (slide 4) "*You are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill*" (v.26) (slide 5) He advised them *not to work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life.*' (v.27) And He clarified to them that that 'work' was to believe in the One God has sent. (v.29). Jesus made sure they were not to ask Him to meet their worldly needs and concerns but instead to focus on Him because He could give them spiritual food which would lead to eternal life.

They thought that what Jesus said to them was ridiculous because they thought only God could give them eternal life. By mentioning that their ancestors in the wilderness had manna, which was bread from heaven, they asked Jesus to show a sign through which they could trust Him. (slide 6) "*What miraculous sign will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?*" (v.30),

In responding to their request for a miraculous sign, Jesus gave them these responses. (slide 7) "*I am the bread of life (v.35, 48)*", "*I am the bread that came down from heaven (v. 41)*" "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven*" (v.51).

If you had been among those people, you might have responded this way: "What the heck? What are you talking about? Are you crazy?"

It was regrettable that they could not understand what He was saying to them. (slide 8) Jesus was telling them that He Himself was the miraculous sign they were seeking.

By repeating these words three times, He made sure they realized that He was 'the sign' and revealed to them who He was and what His ministry on earth would be. (slide 9) We can understand that Jesus wanted them to see and accept Him as the 'new manna', which came from heaven and would give them eternal life.

Jesus explained to them in greater detail about His being bread, listing some of its outstanding characteristics.

First, He made sure they knew that His bread came from God's compelling love for all of His children. (slide 10) "*For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God ... that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.*" (v.38-40) Jesus' point was this: God gave new manna, Jesus, to His people without discrimination or limitations so that anyone could be redeemed by His work on the cross, just as God had given His children manna so that every Israelite could survive in the wilderness,

Second, He made sure they realized that while the manna their forefathers had eaten was necessary for daily sustenance, (slide 11) His bread was indispensable for eternal life. "*But here is the bread that comes from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.*" (v.50)

Third, Jesus taught them that His bread was "*His flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*" (v.51) He continued to say, (slide 12) "*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink the blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.*" (v. 53-54) Here we see that Jesus mentioned His bread as the Holy Communion (the Eucharist), and that it would be the channel to gain salvation and eternal life. Jesus was saying to them that He would be willing to sacrifice Himself on the cross to redeem His people. At the same time, He was telling them that anyone, who would believe in the salvific work of Jesus on the cross, could have eternal life.

However, this teaching came before He was crucified and risen so that no one at this time comprehended what Jesus was saying. Consequently, it was understandable that many of his disciples were grumbling, *"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"* (v.60)

(slide 13) Unfortunately, because of that confusion, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus (v.60, 66). It was impossible for them to comprehend what Jesus was saying to them through the puzzling analogy of bread. They might have been disappointed and upset with Jesus and His teaching.

In the beginning of this sermon, I said that John was different from the other Gospels in how he viewed the story of Jesus's feeding of the five thousand. (slide 14) Now we can notice that John compared Jesus' miraculous feeding story to the Eucharist (the Holy Communion), using the analogy of bread. In doing so, John showed who Jesus was and what kind of ministry He would do on earth. John concluded that Jesus could be compared to new manna from heaven and everyone who would take the Holy Communion could be redeemed and live forever.

What does the scripture today say to each of us? What challenges and wisdom can we apply to our lives?

First of all, let's think more about what made people strive to seek out Jesus. They were focused on gaining their own food, that is, worldly concerns that they expected Jesus to solve for them, not on Jesus Himself. Knowing their intentions, (slide 15) Jesus taught that they should refocus their pursuit on gaining special food that would endure forever.

Each of us needs to ask these questions of ourselves: (slide 16) What is my motivation for following Jesus? Do I have more concern on what I can receive from God, not on God's expectation and vision for my life? Do I feel disappointed with God when I think God does not respond to my expectation? Do I have more interest in receiving God's blessings than nurturing a right relationship with God?

I am not saying this to make you discouraged by examining your faith with its many shortcomings. Instead, I want all of us to know that our Lord wants to ask us these questions to allow us to look into ourselves. God already knows the answers to these questions. God knows what we need to have in order to live our lives even before we ask God for help. God wants and needs to know that we are ready to receive His many blessings.

We need to remember what Jesus said to His disciples. *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (slide 17) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matt 6:31-33)

Second, we should have a strong faith in the Holy Communion. It is our blessing that we can have new manna, which is essential to eternal life.

How do we personally view Holy Communion? Because we celebrate it every month, we may pay little attention to it. We may think of it as a regular ritual for us to check up on how it is going with our souls and spirits. Or we may feel confused about the mysteries of the Holy Communion.

Jesus said that Holy Communion is the special spiritual food that guarantees that we will live an eternal life.

Just as we need to consume enough food with its diverse nutrients like protein, vitamins, and minerals, we need the spiritual food of Holy Communion with its spiritual nutrients that lead to eternal life? Have you thought about those nutrients? I want to introduce three of the many spiritual nutrients to you.

(slide 18) God's compelling love is embedded in the Holy Communion. As sinners, we don't deserve to receive His love, but God doesn't care about our sinful past. He cares about our changed future, trusting us to the very end.

(slide 19) God's sacrificing love is displayed in the Holy Communion, Our Lord was willing to sacrifice Himself on the cross on our behalf and opened the way which leads to God. Without His sacrifice, no salvation.

(slide 20) God's forgiving love is evident in the Holy Communion. Knowing full well how weak His children have been in living out His words, God created a new way of salvation, which is the embracing of His people, regardless of their lack of faith and their disobedience to God. God has forgiven His people through the salvific work of Jesus and reconciled His people to God.

We can discover more spiritual nutrients in the Holy Communion. I hope you will continue to meditate about other spiritual nutrients in the Holy Communion this coming week.

With the nutrients of God's compelling, sacrificing, and forgiving love in the Holy Communion, we can be transformed. **(slide 21)** As we take the Holy Communion, Jesus works through our hearts, minds, thoughts, and behavior to make a difference in our lives. We can become obedient to His will and purpose for our lives.

As we continue to be nourished by the Holy Communion, we are also privileged to live an eternal life. **(slide 22)** The spiritual food (the Holy Communion) leads us to eternal life, which is promised to anyone who is willing to live by God's compelling, sacrificing, and forgiving love, and bear the fruit of His love in their lives.

Is this a difficult lesson for us to learn? Yes, we may think of His teaching as metaphysical, speculative, mystical, or incredible. Using only our human logic and reasoning, we can't help but struggle with this lesson. It is why we need to ask the Holy Spirit to work through us and enlighten us to comprehend the mystery of the Holy Communion.

(slide 23) Let's believe that we are now living an eternal life because we take the Holy Communion. We are now living the first chapter of our eternal lives here in this world and will be living the final chapter of eternal life after we finish our lives here.

This week as we continue to walk with God in our journey through Lent and meditate what our Lord means to us, let's pray that we will become more aware of the mystery of Holy communion and experience how our understanding of eternal life will affect our lives here in the world.