

Gospel text

John 6: 51-58

51 I myself am the living bread that comes from God. If someone eats this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I will give him is my existence in the flesh so that the world may have life."

52 So the Jews were arguing and saying, "How is this guy able to give us his existence in the flesh to eat?" 53 Then Jesus answered them, "Truly, I assure you, if you do not eat the existence in the flesh of the new Adam and if you do not drink his blood, you will not have life in you. 54 Who bites into my existence in the flesh and drinks my blood obtains endless life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my existence in the flesh is really food, and my blood is really drink. 56 Who bites into my existence in the flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. 57 As the Father who is alive sent me and I live by him, so he who take a bite to eat me will also live by me. 58 This is the bread that comes from God; it is different from the bread your fathers ate, because they died. Whoever bites this bread will live forever.

Gospel commentary - Homily

Pass the time ... or live

I know Beverly, an old lady in a senior's home who says she is well surrounded and who receives good care. She appreciates her companions and her table mates. When I ask her how she spends her days, she replies, "I read or watch TV, it helps pass the time". This last sentence leaves me wondering, because it speaks of boredom, and of fleeing forward to deceive boredom: as we would like time to pass more quickly.

Robert is one of his sons. He is in a good government position and says he is very busy. "It's very good to be busy like that," he repeats, "because the end of the day comes faster". But when the evening comes, he watches sports on TV to forget his tiring day, before falling asleep. And with each passing year, he counts the years that remain before his retirement. And this is how old age will come and then he may ask the question: what did I really experience in my life? What was worth living?

How about Beverly and Robert on the art of living? Today, the Gospel of John brings his answer which is somewhat surprising. You want life, you want to live? Bite into the the existence in flesh of Jesus, drink his blood. Before you exclaim: "it's weird", or "not related," take the time to listen to what John has to say.

To remind you of the background for today's story, Jesus mysteriously fed a large crowd the day before with the five barley loaves and two fish that someone had with him, and it was so successful that food was available at will and, despite everything, there were twelve baskets of bread left. So obviously people want to live again the experience. But then the tone changes. Jesus invites people to find out another kind of bread, bread that provides endless life, bread that only he can give. And when people say: of course we want this bread that gives an endless life, give it to us, Jesus answers: eat me! You can easily guess the surprise of people and their question: how is it possible? So let's try to understand what it is about here.

If you are Christians for a long time, you can think: it is not complicated all that, it is what I do every Sunday when, through the host, I eat in the communion the body and the blood of Christ. Very well. But then I have a question for you: if this communion is the way for you to receive an exceptional life, how do you notice the difference between your life and that of others who did not go to communion? And I will tell you that Beverly and Robert receive communion on a regular basis. My question is not intended to be insidious, but wants to warn against a magic vision of things: receiving the host through communion is not on the same level as taking a vitamin B tablet or a dose of glucosamine, admitting that a divine vitamin exists. My parents told me that one day, in a retreat, they asked the preacher how long the body of Christ remained after the host was in their mouths, which caused a laugh in the audience. But you, what would you have answered? The vision of the body of Christ as a magic object leads us to a dead end. Let us try to see things again with the eyes of the evangelist John.

He presents to us a Jesus who says: "Who bites into my flesh and drinks my blood obtains endless life", I translate the word flesh by existence in the flesh, because it designates all that Jesus is, his way of living. Blood designates his life, but in particular his life given to the point of accepting suffering and death. The flesh of Jesus is not like a statue that one looks at, but it is a concrete existence that one accepts to embrace, to make one's own, to incorporate as one bite an apple. And what characterizes this life? Of course, there is boundless and unconditional love that has marked every decision in his life. But there is another aspect today that I want to emphasize: each second of his life was something he received as a gift, as a word from God, as a moment to live fully. Dead or neutral time, i.e. time that is useless and that we can wait for it to pass, does not exist. This is one of the immense challenges of life.

At each second of our life, we can say: yes, I want to live this second, I want to welcome it with all my heart, it is part of me, or conversely say: I will plug my nose and close eyes while waiting for something else, I'm going to dream of something else during this time, I'm going to try to sleep or get drunk. And it is easy to understand why we want to flee these seconds: they are filled either with boredom, or with anxiety, or with suffering. Why should I do otherwise?

However, there are people who act differently. On a human level, a person who is in love often finds every moment wonderful. But what if it is on a spiritual level? It's more mysterious. For many Christians, there is the feeling that their lives and the passing of time are inhabited by a presence linked in their faith to the risen Jesus; there is the feeling that their life and the events of life have a dimension which exceeds them; there is the feeling of being loved in a unique way and that the secret of

life is this love story. So these Christians understand the multiple meanings of the expression: "Who bites into my existence in the flesh... has endless life." They taste the intimacy of the risen Jesus by sharing what they know about his life. At the same time, they bite into the events of their own life, because it is the continuation of this life that the Nazarene has lived with all his being.

I talked about Christians. But there is something universal here. I recently read a report on the Oglala Lakota, a Sioux people of South Dakota, who still have a gaping open wound after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee and successive injustices in the non-compliance of treaties on their territory. Can we be surprised by the high rate of alcoholism? Can we be surprised by the high suicide rate, as evidenced by the suicide of this beautiful 15-year-old girl who had her throat cut last summer, unable to bear this suffering in front of her feeling of worthlessness? So how is it that Martinez, a woman molested by an uncle when she was young and who ends up in prison for the marijuana trade, participates now in sobriety classes, begins to feel the spirit deep in herself and trust the visions that go up in her? And thereafter she will lead a movement to regain the simplicity and the original soul of her people, while standing peacefully with their demands.

Today's text is widely used in the context of the Christian Eucharist. You will understand that reducing Jesus' words on the bread of life to only an invitation to receive the holy communion is biased, even wrong. First of all, symbolically eating the body and blood of Christ first aims at expressing what is happening every day in my life, where I bite into my life as Jesus did himself, and by that I become one with him. Then, this action proclaims my faith that in my biological, psychological and social life, there is a mystery at work that exceeds me. And let's not imagine this life of which Jesus speaks to be as orange globules merging with the white and red globules of our own blood; this life is inseparable from human life in its full grandeur before God, as was that of Jesus.

When you look at the details of your life, you are faced with a choice: to dive in and assume it or flee from it, i.e. choose to live or choose to die. Which one is yours?

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, August 2012