

Eat my flesh, drink my blood. Initially this sounds like something out of a vampire story. Let us see if we can understand what Jesus meant by "eat my flesh and drink my blood." The flesh of Jesus was his complete humanity. John, in the first chapter of his Gospel illustrates this almost passionately. Listen to John's words. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

This prologue in the first chapter of John, introduces the central theme of this Gospel: the divine Savior has come into the world and has given eternal life to those who accept him. In verse 14 of Chapter 1, John says, "and the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Jesus became flesh with all of the limitations and mortality that this implies. John insisted that we must grasp and never let go of the full humanity of Jesus; that he was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

How do we understand this? We come to know that Jesus was the mind of God, living inside the skin of a human being. In Jesus, we see God taking human form upon himself. He faced

our human situation; he struggled with our human difficulties; he battled with our human temptations and he dealt with the everyday trials of that we experience in our human relationships.

What Jesus is saying to us in today's Gospel is "eat my flesh and drink my blood. By doing this you will feed your heart, feed your mind and feed your soul. When you are discouraged and in despair, when you fall to your knees, disgusted with life and living, remember I, Jesus, took that life of yours and those struggles of yours on me."

To eat Jesus' body is to feed on the knowledge of his divine being in human form in order to strengthen and cleanse our own sin-filled humanity. To drink his blood is to take Jesus' very life into our bodies. In Jewish thought, blood stands for life. As blood flows from a wound, life ebbs away. Jesus is saying, "You must take my life into the very center of your being. This life of mine is the very life which comes from God."

What does this mean? Maybe a word picture will help. Let's say you are going out to celebrate a very special occasion; a birthday, an anniversary, maybe even a job or a promotion. You go to your favorite restaurant and order your most favorite dish. Now for some of us it will be beef tenderloin; for others it will be a salmon fillet; for others it will be crème Brule' topped with fresh berries.

Now if this wonderful food is just sitting on the plate, it doesn't satisfy you in the least, unless you are a masochist, a sadist or you are on some really, really strict diet. You can only smell and look at food? You don't really enjoy that delicious food until you eat it; until you take it into your body! Then it becomes a part of you. Your taste buds are happy and your tummy is happy too. Maybe not your thighs!

Once the food was on a plate, looking and maybe smelling fabulous; now it is inside of you. You may be able to recall later in the evening just how wonderful it tasted and how happy it made you feel. Perhaps weeks later, you can recall your experience with a smile. We will have many such great experiences during our lifetime.

So it is with Jesus. As long as he is just a figure in a book, someone we have read about, he is external with us. However, when Jesus enters our hearts, we can feed upon the life and the strength and the incredible vitality that he gives to us. Jesus says to us, "Eat my body, drink my blood. You must stop thinking of me as a subject for theological debate; you must come to me and you must take me into your very being; then you will have real life."

This is what Jesus meant when he spoke about us abiding in him and him in us. When he told us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, he was telling us to feed our hearts and souls and minds

on him and to revitalize our lives with his life until we are filled with the life of God.

I think our Gospel is telling us more than that. Jesus was famous for table fellowship. He ate with many whom the Jews believed to be unworthy. "If you want life, you must come and sit at the table where you eat that broken bread and drink that poured-out wine which somehow in the grace of God, brings you into contact with the love and the life of Jesus Christ."

The disciples knew quite well that Jesus had been claiming to be the very life of God come down from heaven and that no one could live this life or face eternity without submitting to him. For Christians, there is a two fold difficulty. Being a Christian demands an act of surrender to Jesus, an acceptance of him as the final authority; and it demands a moral standard of the highest level.

The disciples were well aware that Jesus claimed to be the very life and mind of God. Their difficulty was in accepting that as true with all of its implications. To this day, many of us resist Jesus, not because it is difficult to intellectualize his reality, but rather because it is difficult to live a life on such a high moral standard.

Jesus continues to teach us of the all-important life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. "My words are spirit and life." He alone can tell us what life is; he alone can put the spirit into us.

He alone gives us the strength to live. Our lives take value from our purpose and our goals. Jesus alone can give us true purpose in our lives and the power to work out that purpose against all odds.

Jesus was very aware that some people would not only reject his offer, but reject it with hostility. No one, man or woman, can accept Jesus unless moved by the Spirit of God. But we can resist that Spirit. We can shut out God on our own.

Life can be cruel. Our ideals, our enthusiasms, our dreams and our loyalties can be taken away. Our lives can become smaller not bigger. Life can leave us with a heart that is shriveled instead of one that is expanded in and through the love of Jesus. In spite of ourselves, God saves us from the tragedies of life.

In verse 68, Simon Peter speaks to Jesus, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Peter's loyalty was based on a personal relationship with Jesus. There were undoubtedly many things that Peter did not understand. But there was something about Jesus for which Peter would die. Christianity is not just a philosophy which we accept. It is a personal response, through the Holy Spirit, to Jesus Christ. It is the allegiance and the love which we give because our hearts will not allow us to do anything less.

Jesus uses the metaphor of eating and drinking his flesh and blood to say to us, "you can have the life you long for, if you receive God's gift from heaven." This metaphor is about faith.

Friday afternoon, I was with Brian Kremian, his wife Kathleen, daughter Ashley and step daughter Katie and her son Christian in the Rainbow Hospice Unit near Lutheran General Hospital. Brian was in the last hours of his life here on earth. Brian knew and believed in Jesus. We prayed together as we laid our hands on him. As I left I said good bye to Brian and thanked him for being my friend. When Kathleen called to say that Brian had died shortly after I left, she said that he closed his mouth, smiled and stopped breathing. Brian was in the presence of his Jesus.

Will you trust him? Will you believe the words and ways of Jesus, making them your own? Will you eat his flesh and drink his blood? Will you believe that to know him gives life everlasting? Will your loved ones see a smile on your face the moment you draw your last breath?