

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Proverbs 9:1-6 / John 6:51-58)  
18.08.2024  
Eternal life – Fear of death

Dear brothers and sisters,

We continue to meditate upon the discourse on the living bread, from chapter 6 of St John's gospel. Today, we hear Jesus promising us eternal life: "Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day". And again: "Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever".

Eternal life is promised by Jesus to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood with faith.

What does Jesus mean by 'eternal life'? In 'eternal life' there are two words: 'life' and 'eternal'.

Eternal life refers first to a quality of life, a life of communion with Jesus and his Father. In John 17 – the prayer of Jesus on the eve of his passion – Jesus tells us that eternal life is 'to know' the only true God and Jesus-Christ whom he has sent. In biblical language, 'knowledge' is not the conclusion of an intellectual process, but the fruit of an experience, a personal contact; and when this knowledge deepens, it becomes love. Eternal life refers to a life of intimacy with the three persons of the Holy Trinity who live within us and in whom we live; eternal life is a life in which God's Word takes flesh in us and through us, a life which reflects God's love for the world, for all people.

Eternal life implies also something unlimited in time, not only a life here and now, but also a life for ever, a life which runs before and after our human death, a life without end.

The idea of eternal life, a life here and now which passes through death and is pursued for ever is not always evident for us. It is enough to contemplate a loved one in his or her coffin to be led to think that all is definitively finished for that person. We have also to admit to the fact that the very idea of death fills us with fear. Are we not always or at least sometimes terrified at the idea that, one day, we shall die, uncertain about our unknown future?

From where does our fear of death come? Does it not come from the fact that we listen to God's promise with our human mind? We don't receive God's word for what it is: God's word. We try to understand God's Word, His promises with our own human understanding, with our own limits. We reduce God's perspective to our human perspective instead of allowing God to be God and to lead us on paths with which we are not familiar. We don't allow God to be God; we don't allow God to surprise us, to lead us beyond our understanding, to enlarge our own little world, our little perspective. We fail to open our minds and hands to receive something new, something much bigger than what our human and limited mind can understand.

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, death is not a meaningless end, but a passage, a birth into fullness of life, life for ever in the presence of Christ Jesus and our brothers and sisters in humanity who have preceded us into glory. Yes, the promise of the Lord is true: He will raise us up on the last

day if we eat his flesh and drink his blood with faith. Yes, anyone who eats this bread will live for ever. The Word of God invites us to enlarge the perspective of our human mind, but this is not something unreasonable, irrational, senseless, or foolish.

Recourse to our own experience can perhaps help us to better understand this.

Imagine if, when we were in the womb of our mother, someone had told us that we and your mother would have to go through a kind of death experience, that we would have to leave the womb of our mother in order to breathe and live, in order to see, smell and touch; actually face our mother, to communicate with her, to speak to her and listen to her, that we would become autonomous, able to enter into relationship with lots of other human beings... Imagine all that. Probably we would have thought: This is impossible, unreasonable, senseless and foolish. Nevertheless, this is exactly what happened!

So, if our birth was possible and not unreasonable, eternal life with the Lord is possible and not unreasonable. The point for us is to be ready to receive from the Lord what seems to be unbelievable, incomprehensible. Eternal life is possible. Death is not a senseless end but a passage towards fullness of life.

To allow God to be God is to trust what the Lord promises us, even if we don't fully understand what he offers us. Let us not reduce the Lord's words to what we can understand. Let us allow our faith to enlarge our minds and make them able to receive and trust what the Lord promises us or says to us. Dear brothers and sisters: These words of the Lord are true: "This is my body, take and eat; this is my blood, take and drink". Or the workers of the last hour receive as much as those who worked from the first hour: this is not our human logic or justice, but it is the Lord's. Death is not a violent and senseless end, but a passage towards fullness of life. Yes, "anyone who eats this bread will live for ever. I will raise him or her up on the last day!"