

**Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time**  
**June 23, 2024**  
**Year of the Most Holy Eucharist**  
**Reflection #26**

*“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.’ The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks, my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.’” (John 6:48-58)*

There are numerous roads we can travel down as we reflect upon these ten verses of Saint John’s Gospel. Thankfully, these roads have been traversed by great saints who left magnificent signs guiding our journey. The first of these, appearing rather odd, states: “To go forward, you must first go backward.” And that, my dear friends, is what we shall do.

Previously, the Jewish listeners had asked Jesus to offer a sign which would undoubtedly prove His claim to be “The One” sent by God. They had offered the example of Moses and how their ancestors had eaten manna in the desert. They had murmured complaints when Jesus described Himself as the “Bread that came down from heaven” which provides eternal life. In verse 48, Jesus returns to His original pronouncement that He IS this Bread despite their questioning. Now, let us place the vehicle in reverse to understand the significance of what Jesus is saying.

The Gospel of Saint John was the last of the four gospels to have been written. Most would judge that Saint John wrote between 80-100AD. This is key for a very important reason — Saint John would have more time to pray and reflect upon how Jesus was God’s promise. He is the fulfillment of the salvific actions and covenants God had initiated since the fall of Adam. When Jesus again states that He is the Bread of life, Saint John and the great Saints who followed after, return to the Garden, in the beginning. If you remember from our reflections in January, when God created man, He placed him in the Garden of Eden. Along with Adam, Eve and other creatures, God had created two specific trees: (1) the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and (2) the Tree of Life. The third chapter of the Book of Genesis describes both the fall and the punishment of mankind due to the sin of Adam and Eve. *“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of **the tree of life**, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of **the tree of life**.”* (Genesis 3:22-24 KJV).

As with the manna in the desert and the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, both provided a real “food” which was eaten. Furthermore, even though the manna sustained life in the desert, it could not prevent death which is a punishment due to Adam and Eve eating the fruit which grew upon the Tree of Good and Evil. Jesus desires to return us to our original glory. A state before sin and death where mankind was as one with God, creation and himself. To do this, the fruit of a new “Tree of Life” must be offered, for the old was closed off by God. Jesus says He is this new fruit, or Bread (His Word), come down from heaven which offers life, eternal life. This Bread to be given mankind would far exceed the others for it would not be a fruit in similar fashion, rather it would be God. Jesus, God, is saying that He is this Bread which must be eaten. And, as we will reflect upon next week, the Jewish listeners are horrified by this because Jesus further states that this Bread of Life to be eaten will be His Flesh, along with the addition of His Blood which too must be consumed.