

Give me the Bread of Life!

When I was a young boy, I used to spend part of my summer vacation on a family farm owned by my parents' friends, Mr. & Mrs. Watts. If they had first names, I never heard them or at least noticed what they were ... nor would I have ever **DREAMED** of calling those tough, weathered adults by anything but Mr. or Mrs. Watts. Even though I was just a visitor to their world, I would have been sent to the wood shed if I had ever **IMAGINED** calling them anything else.

And that wouldn't have been to get fire wood either.

Now ... **MORNING** comes **REALLY** early on a farm!!! I mean, **WHO** in their right mind would consider 4 o'clock as **MORNING**?!?!?

Being rather young and frail – and a **CITY BOY** at that – I was usually allowed to **SLEEP IN** – if one can call it that – until about **5:30** when I would be sent off by Mrs. Watts to the hen house to bring back some fresh eggs for breakfast.

Eggs **DIDN'T** come from the supermarket for the Watts family!!!

Nor did that staple of all foods ... **BREAD**.

Mrs. Watts was just a **BIT** difficult to understand ... as her native tongue was Swedish ... **AND** she saw no need to wear her **TEETH** until it was time to eat ... but she would clearly make you understand that the very **IDEA** of anyone eating what she referred to as **“BOUGHTEN”** bread was incredible ... and totally unbelievable.

Anyone who ever tasted Mrs. Watts' bread would undoubtedly agree!

The **SMELL** of her fresh bread baking in her wood-fired oven as I returned from the hen house would make my stomach growl and my mouth water ... and it would definitely keep me in the kitchen instead of trying to sneak off for a few more minutes of sleep!!!

And how **GOOD** that bread was!!!

Sometimes Mrs. Watts would let me have a piece of that bread as it came out of the oven, liberally slathering wild honey and real, homemade butter on it as she warned me that it would be hot ... and it was.

But the taste was literally out of this world.

I can **STILL** smell and taste that bread as I stand up here and talk to you about it today!!!

And that bread was not only featured at breakfast but at **ALL** the other meals as well.

That's because **BREAD** is present on most **EVERY** table – at **EVERY** meal – throughout the world.

Bread **CAN** be ordinary.

Don't want to take your medicine on an empty stomach? Grab a piece of bread. No time for breakfast? Snatch some toast on your way out. Only have 30 minutes for lunch? Slap some cheese between a couple slices of bread.

Even those cultures we associate with rice or pasta consider bread to be something **SPECIAL**, a treat to be savored and enjoyed.

In past weeks, we've heard about Jesus breaking **BREAD** with sinners, and multiplying loaves of **BREAD** for thousands of followers. And in the Hebrew Scriptures, we read about God sending down manna – **BREAD** from Heaven – to the Israelites.

In this morning's reading from the Old Testament, we learned about God sustaining the Prophet Elijah for his journey in the desert by providing a jug of water and a hearth cake ... that is ... **BREAD** baked in a fireplace.

And in the gospel, we continue to hear Jesus describing himself as **THE BREAD OF LIFE** ...

Now ... I'm going to ask you to do something that most preachers would cringe at ... because, in general, we don't want anyone leafing through books while we deliver our homily ... but I'm asking you – right now – to pick up your missalette ...

Go ahead, pick it up. There it is in the seat back right there in front of you.

Open it up. What does it say at the very top of the cover?

That's right ... **BREAKING BREAD!!!**

Now ... **PLEASE** ... put it back ... !

It should be no surprise to us that our missalette and song book is entitled **BREAKING BREAD!!!**

As Catholics, we have an **INTENSE** devotion to the Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, not long ago, we celebrated the **FEAST** of the Body and Blood of Christ ... Corpus Christi!!!

As many of you know, I'm a convert from protestantism, and I can tell you that **THIS** devotion is **NOT THERE!!!**

I often wonder why that is ...

Don't get me wrong ... they **LOVE** Jesus and they love the Bible, and I will always thank them for passing that love on to me ... but the concept of consuming Jesus's Body and Blood as life-giving **FOOD** is taken as code or euphemism for the **WORD** of God ... that is, the **TEXT** of the Bible ... and **NOT** as an actual, literal command.

I was a member of a large denomination – based in the south – that will remain nameless – but which often states publicly:

“If the Bible says it, we believe it, and that settles it!”

Yet, when it comes to the Gospel of John, Chapter 6, that credo seems to be ignored.

It is quite clear to me from reading John's gospel that **ALL** Christians should adore Christ's Body and Blood!!!

Jesus **HIMSELF** declares:

“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.”

That seems clear enough to me.

As we listen to the words of consecration in the Eucharist which will follow shortly after this homily, remember that it was Jesus **HIMSELF** who commanded us to do this.

He did **NOT** say “This is **LIKE** my body” ... He said “This **IS** my body”!
Nor did He did not say “This is **LIKE** my blood” ... He said “This **IS** my blood”!

And he could **NOT** have been referring to the story of salvation in the gospel as **SPIRITUAL** food.

Why not?

Well, because the gospels – or **ANY** other part of what we call the New Testament – had not yet been written!!!

And wouldn't be until **DECADES** after his death on the Cross.

Always keep in mind that the Bible came **FROM** the Church which Christ Himself established. The Church **DIDN'T** come from the Bible because the Bible is a **PRODUCT** of the Church.

Confused? Don't be.

A protestant friend once told me:

“You Catholics have the Eucharist but **WE** have the Bible.”

In fact, we Catholics have **BOTH** while our separated brethren have sadly denied themselves the **JOY** of the Eucharist.

This mass – and **ALL** masses – have **TWO** main parts:

The Liturgy of the Word ... **AND** the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

I am **VERY** glad to be Catholic because I can **REJOICE** when I hear God's message proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word ... and then I can **REJOICE** anew when Jesus offers himself to **ME** as food for **MY** journey through the desert by way of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Jesus gives us **REAL FOOD** for life here on Earth **AND** for eternal life in the hereafter.

When I stand before the Father and He asks me if I believed in His Son and followed His commands on Earth, I can answer “Yes, Lord.”

What about you?

Do **YOU** believe in the **REAL PRESENCE** of God in the Eucharist?

Will **YOU** be able to look the Father in the eye on the Day of Judgment and say, “Yes, Lord, I believed in Jesus your Son **AND** I have eaten of the Bread of Life” ... ?