

GOSPEL OF JOHN 6:51 – 59

Fr. Behr notes:

- There is a progression in language from *eating bread* to *chewing the flesh* of Jesus.
- “Flesh” refers to or applies the “world of appearance” – in other words, that which we see with our sense perception, our eyes. (8:15) Or human weakness (1:13,3:6,17:2). It is unable to give life (6:63), and so is dead.
- Here, “flesh” is now being identified with Jesus himself.

⁵¹“I am the bread, the living *one*, the *One* having come down out of the heavens; if anyone should eat of this bread, he shall live forever. And indeed the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Fr. Behr: “The change, in 6:51 from the past tense, *the One having come down*, to the future tense, for the bread which Jesus will give as his flesh indicates that this ‘flesh’ is something that Jesus must become...that which he will give, through the passion, as the living bread which descends from heaven, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man...”

Saint Bede: “He called Him the ‘living’ God to distinguish Him from the false gods which the Gentile world, deluded by various errors, had made for themselves out of dead men, or, by a greater madness, had created from insensible matter which they could adore.” [Ib., 198.]

Saint Gregory the Great: “The One Who wished to be broiled by the turmoil of His Passion in His human nature fed us with the bread of His divinity when He said, ‘I am the bread, the living *one*, that came down out of heaven [Jn. 6:51].’ And so He ate broiled fish and bread to show us by this food that He bore His Passion in our human nature, and also provided food for us in His divine nature.” [Ib., 184.]

⁵²Then the Jews began quarreling with one another, saying, “How is this One able to give us *His* flesh to eat?”

Cyril of Jerusalem: “Failing to understand his words spiritually, the Jews were offended and drew back...do not judge the issue on the basis of taste, but on the basis of faith be assured beyond all doubt that you have been allowed to receive the body and blood of Christ.”

⁵³Then Jesus said to them, “Verily, verily, I say to you, unless you should eat (*fage- to partake of food*) the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you are not having life in yourselves.

Saint Justin Martyr: “Among us the food is called the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the one who believes that the things we teach are true, and who has also been washed with the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has taught us. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but as Jesus Christ our Savior, made flesh by the Logos of God, took flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught, that the food which is consecrated by the prayer of His words, and by which our own flesh and blood by transmutation is nourished, is the flesh and blood of the Jesus Who became flesh and blood.”

Saint Hilary: “As to the verity of the flesh and blood there is no room left for doubt. For now both from the declaration of the Lord Himself and our own faith, it is verily flesh and verily blood. And these, when eaten and drunk, bring it to pass that both we are in Christ and Christ in us.” [On the Trinity, Bk. VIII, § 14, in Nicene, 2nd Ser., IX:141.]

⁵⁴“The *one* who partakes (*trogon* – the chew on, gnaw) of My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up in the last day.

Saint Irenæos: “For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly, so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.”

Saint Irenæos: “By His own blood He redeemed us....And as we are His members, we are also nourished by means of the creation....He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews (sprinkles) our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies. When, therefore,...the mingled cup and the bread that is broken...become the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ, from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can the heretics affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him? Even the blessed Paul declares that ‘we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones [Eph. 5:30].’ He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man, for a spirit has not bones nor flesh; but he refers to that dispensation by which the Lord became an actual man, consisting of flesh, and nerves, and bones—that flesh which is nourished by the cup which is His blood, and receives increase from the bread which is His body....So also our bodies, being nourished by it, when deposited in the earth and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Logos of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, Who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is ‘made perfect in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9].’”

⁵⁵“For My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink.

Saint Chrysostom: “What is He saying? He either wants to say that this is true food which saves the soul, or to assure them,...that they might not think the words spoken are an enigma or even a parable, but that they might especially know that it is needful to eat the body.” [Hom. 47, *P.G.* 59:275 (col. 263).]

⁵⁶“The *one* who eats (*trogon* – chew) My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

Jn. 6:56.] Saint Ambrose: “Christ feeds His Church with these sacraments, by means of which the substance of the soul is strengthened....Wherefore, too, the Church, beholding so great grace, exhorts her sons and her friends to come together to the sacraments, saying, ‘Eat, O friends, and drink; yea, brethren, drink abundantly [Song 5:1].’ What we eat and what we drink the Holy Spirit has elsewhere made plain, saying, ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that hopeth in Him [Ps. 33(34):8].’ In that sacrament is Christ, because it is the body of Christ, it is therefore not bodily food but spiritual....That food,

as the prophet recorded, strengthens our heart, and that drink 'maketh glad the heart of man [Ps. 103(104):16(15)].'"

Saint Kyril of Alexandria: "O sublime condescension! The Creator gives Himself to His creatures, for their delight. Life bestows Itself on mortals, as food and drink. 'Come, eat My body,' He exhorts us, 'and drink the wine I have mingled for you. I have prepared Myself as food. I have mingled Myself for those who desire Me. Of Mine own will I became flesh, and have become a partaker of your flesh and blood....Eat of Me Who am Life, and live, for this is what I desire. Eat My bread, for I am the life-giving grain of the wheat, and I am the bread of life. Drink the wine I have mingled for you, for I am the draught of immortality. I am the true vine [Jn. 15:1]; drink the wine which I have mingled for you [Prov. 9:5].'" [*Meditation on the Mystical Supper*, Hom. 10, P.G. 77, in Toal, III:155-157.]

⁵⁷"Even as the living Father sent Me forth, and I live because of the Father, also the *one* who eats (*trogon* – chewing on me) Me, even he shall live because of Me. ⁵⁸"This One is the bread, the *One* having come down out of the heavens—not as your fathers ate the manna, and died. The *one* who eats this bread shall live forever." ⁵⁹These things He said in *the* synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

Origen: One way is to see this *chewing* as referring the ruminating on scriptures and by doing so we have Christ – "his flesh and blood ...are the divine scriptures, chewing which, we have Christ; the words becoming his bones, the flesh becoming the meaning from the text...and the blood being faith in the gospel of the new covenant." (Fr. Behr)

The Martyrs- We are to become *bread* – "Polycarp, before his martyrdom prayed, 'that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, for resurrection to eternal life.' And when his body was burnt, the smell was of 'bread being baked.' Ignatius saw his own impending death as a martyr as the occasion where he hopes to become 'the pure bread of Christ' and, 'a word of God' and indeed, a 'human being.' – Christians in this period needed no reminding what it means to reply affirmatively to Christ's question: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Fr. Behr)

Man is what he eats

"Man must eat on order to live; he must take the world into his body and transform it into himself, into flesh and blood. He is indeed that which he eats, and the whole world is presented as one all-embracing banquet table for man...In the Bible the food that man eats...is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with* God...it all exists to make God known to man. (Schmemmann, For the Life of the world)."