

BULLETIN – JUNE 7

Our promise of prayer goes out to our parish secretary, Barbara King, and her family on the death of their mother and grandmother, Virginia Thomas, at her home in Romulus at the age of 96, on Thursday, May 28, 2015. Virginia was buried from Sacred Heart Church in Detroit last Tuesday morning. May she rest in peace!

Corpus Christi procession. Our procession this year is a much scaled-down version of those of recent years. We will do our own simple parish procession right in church at the end of the 9:30 a.m. Sunday Mass. Those who wish to join in the procession around the church interior as we walk with the Blessed Sacrament are cordially invited to do so, forming a rear guard behind the priest and servers. The brief exposition, procession, and benediction will take place after Communion, and will conclude the Mass.

“If he could, why wouldn’t he?” A non-Catholic friend posed this question to his pastor during a Bible study at their church. My friend is very familiar with Catholic teaching and practice, and is a very active member of his own congregation. The class had come to John 6, which we shall be reading from extensively on several Sundays later this summer. This chapter is often referred to as the summary of John’s Eucharistic theology, and so its meaning is disputed by those churches which do not celebrate nor believe in the Eucharist as we do in the Catholic Church. We should mention that the dispute was not initiated by the Catholic Church. It’s true that many non-Scriptural and unhealthy accretions had crept into the celebration of the Eucharist during the 1500 years prior to the Reformation. But according to the witness of the Scriptures, the witness of all the early Fathers or great writers of the Church, and the witness of the Church’s actual practice, the Church in both the East and the West, both Catholic and Orthodox, has always been correct in insisting that Christ really meant it when he said, “My flesh is real food, and my Blood real drink. The one who eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life.”

My friend had begun the conversation when the pastor noted that these words in John 6 were of course to be taken figuratively. “Why is that?” my friend asked. “Don’t we rather in our tradition tend to say that the words of Scripture should be taken literally? Why would these words alone be an exception?”

The pastor paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. “Well, it’s like the Bible saying the sun rose. We know it doesn’t really, and that the earth revolves. It’s a figure of speech.”

“Why doesn’t Jesus make that clear?” my friend continued. “You’d think that with something as important as this, when even the Gospel says that many of his disciples couldn’t accept this teaching and walked away, Christ would have called them back and said, ‘Wait, I was only speaking in parables. Don’t leave!’”

The pastor explained patiently, “That was a rejection of Jesus himself, not of the words about flesh and blood. They knew he didn’t mean eating his flesh and drinking his blood. He simply couldn’t have. Christianity is not cannibalism.”

“But that’s not what the Scripture says,” my friend went on excitedly. “Here in verse 52, the people are asking, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ That’s

precisely what upset them! In verse 60 they say, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’ Figurative language isn’t hard or demanding. Jesus used that all the time.”

“But to take these words literally goes against common sense,” the pastor said, now with a hint of exasperation in his voice. “Christ wouldn’t expect us to do something as outrageous as actually eating his real flesh and blood. It’s symbolic.”

“Is Christ God?” my friend asked.

“Why, of course,” the pastor replied, “he’s the Son of God become man. He’s the divine Son of God.”

“The same God who created the universe out of nothing?” my friend went on. “The same God who appeared to Moses in a burning bush that wasn’t consumed by the flames? The same God who parted the waters of the Red Sea, contrary to the laws of the nature he created? The same God and Man who changed water into wine at Cana?”

“Well, of course,” the pastor admitted, “you know *that*.”

“So if he *wanted* to be present in bread and wine and make it his flesh and blood, *could* he have done it?” my friend asked.

“Certainly, but he wouldn’t do anything that would defy the laws of nature,” the pastor said warily, knowing he was on shaky ground.

“You mean like rise from the dead?” my friend asked simply. “If he *could* have done it, why *wouldn’t* he, when he did so many other things that require faith to accept?”

“Your arguments are sounding awfully Catholic,” the pastor said with a chuckle, causing a murmur of subdued laughter among the other participants.

My friend responded, very quietly and deliberately, “I’m not trying to win a court case here, Reverend. It bothers me that we might be rejecting a doctrine just because Catholics *accept* it. I mean, we know from history that this was the belief of the whole Church right up until the Reformation.”

“Well,” the pastor noted, “it was the belief of the whole Church only because the Church said it had to be. That doesn’t mean that individual Christians all believed it. That’s why we don’t accept any central authority. Each of us is free to interpret the Scripture on his own.”

“Then why couldn’t I interpret John 6 to mean a command from Jesus to really eat his body and drink his blood?” my friend asked. “With all due respect, Reverend, who’s to say, if you believe in private interpretation, that you’re right and that the billion or so Catholics in the world are wrong?”

The pastor finally didn’t have an answer. He jokingly replied, “Whew, it sounds like you’re getting ready to swim the Tiber, my friend.”

My friend hasn’t yet taken that plunge. But he’s become even more expert at understanding what the Catholic Church teaches, and why. Could **you** have engaged someone in a discussion like this, and felt confident in proclaiming your Catholic faith, drawing on Scripture and Church teaching to clearly present your/our beliefs? If not, why not? Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ incorporates you into the Lord Jesus. On this Solemnity of Corpus Christi, let’s delight in the mystery the Lord sets before us, and ponder how we might grow in our ability to speak of it fluently. It would be a shame if we had to let our Protestant friends learn about this great truth all on their own! God bless you!

Thought for the week: “Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it” (Flannery O’Connor, 1925-1964, American Southern Catholic author, to a former Catholic regarding the mystery of the Eucharist).