

Reflection for the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:67-69

Our Gospel reading this Sunday, the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time, it taken from the Gospel of John Chapter 6: 60-69. This reading contains three verses that are often referred to as "Peter's Confession." It is in these three verses that Simon Peter states that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In the Gospel of John this statement of Simon Peter as to who Jesus is happens when Jesus is speaking about the fact that He is the bread of life that came down from heaven and if they do not eat this bread, they will not have eternal life. "Peter's Confession," in the Gospel of John is surrounded by the discussion and focus of "Jesus, the Bread of Life." Chapter 6 in the Gospel of John has a driving message about the Eucharist and its importance to us in our journey to salvation. Peter's statement found at the end of chapter seems to confirm the importance of the Eucharist in our journey of faith, but also in our knowing of who Jesus is. The statement of Peter and the focus of Chapter 6 in the Gospel of John seems to be pointing us to the understanding that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. That without the Eucharist, Jesus the Bread of Life, we have a gaping whole in our lives and in our theological understanding of who Jesus is.

The connection of "Jesus the Bread of Life," and that fact that Jesus is the Son of God is not as clearly connected in the other three Gospel readings. Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, and Luke 9: 18-21 all contain "Peter's Confession." But in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus is the one that asks who they and others think he is, and it is this question that prompts Simon Peter to state that Jesus is the Son of God. In the Gospel of John, the question that prompts Simon Peter to state that Jesus is the Son of God is Jesus asking His Apostles if they are going to leave him. The Followers of Christ in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John are struggling with Jesus' "Bread of Life Discourse." It is in chapter 6:26-66 of the Gospel of John that Jesus explains that he is the bread of life and that in order of us to have eternal life, we must be willing to eat his body and drink his blood or we will not have life within us. This idea and concept of spiritual food is a whole new idea for the followers of Christ to embrace and understand.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke they do not have a section that is like chapter 6:26-66 of the Gospel of John. This is where the role of the Gospel of John as the last Gospel written is to expand and explain that other three Gospels. The Gospel of John being written around 90-110 AD, is at least 20, younger then, the Gospel of Mark 66-70 AD, which is the first of the four Gospel written. But the Gospel of John was also written after both Matthew and Luke which were written sometime around 85-90 AD. The author of John was clearly aware of the other three Gospels, and it appears the motivation of the Gospel of John was not to introduce someone to Jesus Christ and the new faith, but rather to expand on the understanding of the faith. This is where chapter 6 of the Gospel of John makes a great deal of sense and why a large part of the chapter is only found in the Gospel of John. The author of this Gospel was attempting to explain the importance of the Eucharist, the bread of life. As Catholics we can at times take the understanding of the Eucharist for granted and assume it does not need to be explained. Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John makes sure that we do not forget the importance of Jesus, the bread of life, that He as the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith.