August 16, 2015
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time – “The Bread of Life – Now and Eternally”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1: Proverbs 9:1-6
Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven columns; she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine, yes, she has spread her table. She has sent out her maidens; she calls from the heights out over the city: “Let whoever is simple turn in here; To the one who lacks understanding, she says, Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding.”

Reading 2: Ephesians 5:15-20
Brothers and sisters: Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Gospel: John 6, 51-58
Jesus said to the crowds: “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.”

HOMILY
No worries, it was only a practice game Friday. The Bills learned a lot from that game – remember, the best is yet to come, right?

Football – like everything else in this world – it’s dog-eat-dog out there, and if I can’t prove that to you, I’ll eat my words – maybe, I’ll eat my hat. They say you can’t have your cake and eat it, too, but we went out to dinner Friday night for Barb’s birthday, not intending to eat like a horse … well, eat your heart out, we might eat some humble pie after that meal, maybe even eat some crow. And we won’t even talk about people who eat like birds, or eat like pigs, or whatever else. Because, you know, you are what you eat. … Ah, yes, the wonderful world of metaphors – what a wonderful way to get a point across with a figure of speech – words used to make a point, but not to be taken literally.

In today’s Gospel reading, we are treated to a 4th week of John, Chapter 6. Who was present three weeks ago when I mentioned that the Church’s liturgy has us detour from Mark’s Gospel into John, Chapter 6, for five weeks? … Who remembers what John, Chapter 6, is ALL about? … Remember that it’s ALL about the Eucharist! … Who did their homework and looked up the various meanings of the Eucharist in the Catechism? … Hmmm, we’ll need to work on that one.
John was a very interesting, yet complex, writer – being the youngest disciple of Jesus, he survived the longest, and wrote his Gospel story of Jesus last, some 50 or so years after Christ’s resurrection and ascension. He was almost certainly aware of the other Gospel accounts, of the various Christian communities forming, and growing, and of the various issues and needs that required attention – attention that he could provide, personally learning from Christ Himself. Our current detour into John, Chapter 6, and the Eucharist is somewhat like a mystery story in that it begins rather simply, but then becomes increasingly more complex as the storyline continues … and events … and words … unfold … until the real message is revealed. John’s account began with the feeding of the five thousand, if you recall from three weeks ago. Jewish people from all over heard of the miracles that Jesus was performing, and they gathered around Him primarily to see more signs but also to hear what He had to say. When they all personally experienced this miracle of fish and bread, they were so excited, they wanted to make Him their political ruler, their king! Then, two weeks ago, the story deepened, the so-called onion was being peeled, we heard about Jesus describing Himself to the Jewish people as the gift from God that provides life, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” Then, last week, the crowd began to murmur about Jesus, as He delved deeper and deeper, “Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God;” and then He repeated, “I am the bread of life.” The final verse from last week is repeated again this week, “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.” WHOA! Did you catch that?? It’s no longer bread, but now FLESH! We’re told that the murmuring from the crowd becomes a quarrel!

But, it’s just a metaphor … right? Jesus didn’t really mean to eat His flesh, did He? Well, Jesus offered no explanation, no apology, nothing to suggest that He didn’t mean what He said, but rather, He repeated it, four more times, offering the invitation to both eat His flesh AND drink His blood. The crowd understood that also, and that was enough for most of them – next week, we’ll hear who leaves and who stays as Jesus’ disciples. But, for now, Jesus goes even deeper – this true food and true drink provides a life with Jesus in the present, “Whoever eats my flesh has eternal life.” And this true food and true drink will provide eternal life in the future, “I will raise him on the last day.” How great is that! Jesus offers eternal life to those who eat this living bread, not just in the future but now also!

Let’s put this all together: in my earlier summary of metaphors, you may remember that I ended with “you are what you eat.” St. Augustine, back around the 5th century, invited the people to receive the Eucharist with, “Behold what you are! Become what you receive!” Jesus effectively made this a two-way relationship, “Whoever eats my flesh drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” He is asking for a deeply personal relationship with those who partake of His flesh and blood. Now think of personal relationships that you currently have, or have had in the past. Consider those that appear to be working well, and what you need to do for them to continue that way –

- Those that work the best are probably cared for with TLC, tended to and nurtured as often as possible, maybe even daily, by both parties.
- Those that work the best are the ones where each person is sensitive to what the other person truly needs and not necessarily what they want.
- Those that work the best are those where each person believes in the other person, and works to keep that relationship strong and healthy.

Going back to your relationship with Jesus, consider how much personal attention you are paying to it, how you are working to keep that relationship strong and healthy, how Jesus is always there for you, just by asking that of Him. Now consider how sensitive you might be to what Jesus might be truly asking of
you. Consider how you might see the world through the eyes of Jesus. Pope Francis repeatedly talks about the marginalized in the world around us. About two months ago, he said, “Jesus does not marginalize anyone ever. Ever. He marginalized himself by including the marginalized and including us, sinners and outcasts, in his life.” And, the Pope’s intentions for August are: selflessness and generosity towards the marginalized. We jokingly talked about homework earlier. Seriously, though, pray that you may see the face of Jesus in the marginalized of society – those who are hurt or at risk physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, financially. Consider how you might give some more TLC to that aspect of your relationship with Christ.

Maybe you can think of some personal relationships that may not be going so well for you – everybody has hurts at one time or another, some very serious, and we don’t mean to dwell on those here, but perhaps you might consider asking Jesus for some extra help – help in your hurting relationship, or maybe help for you to get through it. Jesus is always there – we just need to ask for His help.

One final comment – the Greek word for eat used in John’s passage today is much more than simply taking in the food – it means chew, or gnaw, and there’s an element of haste in the meaning, not something that can languish over time, or wait until the last moment. Maybe consider that in your personal relationships with others, and also with Christ. Real relationships need to be tended to often, and not left until “the end.”

As Catholic Christians, we believe that our Eucharist offers us the true food and true drink spoken of by Jesus in today’s Gospel passage. We now continue with our life with Jesus in the present, and look forward to life eternal with God – remember, the best is yet to come.