

Sermon for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 14, 13viii2006, 08:30 / 10:00
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist – Missa Brevis / Holy Communion Liturgy, LBW Setting 2
1 Kings 19:4-8, Psalm 34:1-8, Ephesians 4:25-5:2, John 6:35,41-51

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

Jesus said to them: "I am the living bread
that came down from heaven. Whoever
eats of this bread will live forever, and
the bread that I will give for the life of
the world is my flesh."

-- John 6:51

I must begin today with an apology at this main service of
worship. Unlike those who worshipped at today's early
service, you who are gathered for worship at this hour will
not be hearing and reflecting on today's Holy Gospel in
that context for which it was undoubtedly first written and
in which it was undoubtedly first heard. That is to say,
you will go from this church to your homes today not

both hearing about Christ's personal gift of Himself to us in Holy Communion *and* receiving that gift as well. Had I followed through with a project approved by our Worship and Music Committee, this Sunday would have been added to the Communion Sundays for this year. It seemed prudent to put that project on hold, however, until the new Lutheran Lectionary is issued this coming October with the publication of our church's new hymnal. In any case, I pray that this will be the last Sunday on which you will hear a Gospel text so profoundly rooted in the Sacrament of the Altar without being able to celebrate and receive that great Sacrament. Thanks be to God that, just as the Bread of the Presence was kept in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and in the Sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Bread of Christ's presence is enthroned behind the Altar of this church, there ready as a comfort

for the sick but also for us, on those days when the celebration of the Holy Eucharist has not been scheduled.

One of the most beautiful and spiritually uplifting proclamations of this continuation of last Sunday's Gospel is to be found at Hymn No. 702 in the supplementary hymnal, *With One Voice*. I invite you to turn to open the little blue hymnal to that number now. This hymn, written and made popular by the Catholic Order of Medical Mission Sisters. The second half of verse 44 is personalized for each worshipper as it is reiterated in the hymn's refrain: "And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up, and I will raise you up on the last day."

That stress is exactly where it should be, for that is what God does for us in Jesus Christ. That is what God does in not only creating and sustaining us but

in taking on our very humanity and redeeming our human history in Jesus Christ, being born of a human mother. In some churches today, but according to the Western calendar on Tuesday of this week, the Feast Day it was my privilege to choose as the day of my Ordination in 1986, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the world will commemorate both that birth and the precept of faith that Our Risen Lord welcomed His Blessed Mother home to His side before the Father's throne of glory, the first among Christians by her profession of faith at the Archangel's Annunciation and the first among Christians in receiving the fulfillment of her destiny to stand in God's presence forever by grace, the fulfillment of Christ's promise to all Christians in today's Gospel.

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty . . . No

one can come to me unless drawn by the Father Who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day" (vv. 40b, 44). God Himself comes down to us so that He may raise us up with Him. This is the core of our belief, though it is quite literally none-sense to others.

To Jews, our confession that Jesus is God-become-human and our gathering to receive His mystical Body and Blood in Holy Communion represent little more than the beliefs of confused, if well-meaning, people, making about as much sense as if I were to say to you, "Please pass me the piano." All the words of Christian faith make sense, except when they are put together in a sentence with a subject, a predicate and a verb.

To Muslims, our faith in Christ the Bread of Life amounts to an obnoxious act of idolatry. It is obnoxious because, according at least to the strict

fundamentalism of the Wahabi Sunnis and of the Shiites who are making this life such a living hell for their own people and the rest of the world just now, this life is nothing more than a sickly, deformed foreshadowing of the reality of paradise. Little that is truly good begins here, in this time and place we call the world. Only after death is there hope, but only for those who have lived a faultlessly moral life or died a so-called 'martyr's' death. Why would *God* enter this filth?! And, in any case, to teach that *God* has a son or that *God* is a human being is to commit the unforgivable sin of *shirk*, that is idolatry, for which only punishment by the sword is appropriate.

To the rest of the religious and non-religious world, a great deal of it being a *post-Christian* world, a world that has lost all sense of the faith that built the civilization of compassion, of peace-making and justice most

take for granted, the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen Lord to Whom the Church tenaciously clings in her teaching, prayer and worship and His promise to feed us so that, in spite of death we shall live forever, has been discarded as a useless færy tale.

But, thanks be to God, God's Word and the Church's memory takes us back further than that! It was Saint Irenæus, a Bishop of the Early Church who was martyred when still in his late teens or early twenties—*truly* martyred, without attempting to kill anyone else—who wrote of how God raises us up to joy, to glory, to a new life without sin, to an eternal life with God. "Only that which God assumes (e.g., takes on Himself) can be redeemed." Only that which is assumed, only that which is lifted up in God's own mercy, can be redeemed, can be saved, can be set free to reflect the glory of the Creator.

The Living God Who promises Himself to us, Who gives Himself to us in Jesus Christ, *loves* this world and us in it. Far from regarding us and our world as beneath Him, as unworthy of His concern, the Living God leads those who turn to Him toward a life of greater fullness here and toward fulfillment of that life in all its limited goodness in the life to come.

May He Who has fed us so often with His precious Body and Blood make us hunger and thirst for this great Sacrament even more, that our longing for Him and our trust and joy in Him would grow greater with each fulfillment of His promise to be the fulfillment of our deepest hunger and thirst. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

✠Amen.

