

John 6:41-52

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the significance of Jesus as the Bread of Life and the importance of approaching the Eucharist with reverence and purity.

Scripture: John 6:44-45, John 6:48, 1 Corinthians 11:29, Ephesians 5:30, Hebrews 10:29, Hebrews 13:15

Topics: "Eucharist Theology", "Faith Formation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the Jews murmuring at Jesus for claiming to be the Bread of Life from heaven, highlighting their lack of understanding and faith in His divine origin. He explains how Jesus draws people to Himself through the Father and emphasizes the importance of being taught by God to believe. Chrysostom delves into the significance of the Eucharist, describing it as a mystical union with Christ's body and blood, symbolizing a deep spiritual connection and nourishment for believers. He warns about partaking unworthily and stresses the reverence and gratitude Christians should have for receiving such a sacred gift.

Transcript

The Jews then murmured at Him, because He said, I am the Bread which came down from heaven; and they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, I came down from heaven?

1. Whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame Philippians 3:19, said Paul of certain persons, writing to the Philippians. Now that the Jews were of this character is clear, both from what has gone before, and from what they came and said to Christ. For when He gave them bread, and filled their bellies, they said that He was a Prophet, and sought to make Him a King: but when He taught them concerning spiritual food, concerning eternal life, when He led them away from objects of sense, and spoke to them of a resurrection, and raised their thoughts to higher matters, when most they ought to have admired, they murmur and start away. And yet, if He was that Prophet as they before asserted, declaring that he it was of whom Moses had said, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like me, unto Him shall you hearken Deuteronomy 18:15; they ought to have hearkened to Him when He said, I came down from heaven; yet they hearkened not, but murmured. They still revered Him, because the miracle of the loaves was recent, and therefore they did not openly gainsay Him, but by murmuring expressed their displeasure, that He did not give them the meal which they desired. And murmuring they said, Is not this the son of Joseph? Whence it is plain, that as yet they knew not of His

strange and marvelous Generation. And so they still say that He is the son of Joseph, and are not rebuked; and He says not to them, I am not the Son of Joseph; not because He was his son, but because they were not as yet able to hear of that marvelous Birth. And if they could not bear to hear in plain terms of His birth according to the flesh, much less could they hear of that ineffable Birth which is from above. If He revealed not that which was lower to them, much less would He commit to them the other. Although this greatly offended them, that He was born from a mean and common father, still He revealed not to them the truth, lest in removing one cause of offense He should create another. What then said He when they murmured?

John 6:44

No man can come unto Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw Him.

The Manichæians spring upon these words, saying, that nothing lies in our own power; yet the expression shows that we are masters of our will. For if a man comes to Him, says some one, what need is there of drawing? But the words do not take away our free will, but show that we greatly need assistance. And He implies not an unwilling comer, but one enjoying much succor. Then He shows also the manner in which He draws; for that men may not, again, form any material idea of God, He adds,

John 6:46

Not that any man has seen God, save He which is of God, He has seen the Father.

How then, says some one, does the Father draw? This the Prophet explained of old, when he proclaimed beforehand, and said,

John 6:45

They shall all be taught of God. Isaiah 54:13

Do you see the dignity of faith, and that not of men nor by man, but by God Himself they shall learn this? And to make this assertion credible, He referred them to their prophets. If then 'all shall be taught of God,' how is it that some shall not believe? Because the words are spoken of the greater number. Besides, the prophecy means not absolutely all, but all that have the will. For the teacher sits ready to impart what he has to all, and pouring forth his instruction unto all.

John 6:44

And I will raise him up in the last day.

Not slight here is the authority of the Son, if so be that the Father leads, He raises up. He distinguishes not His working from that of the Father, (how could that be?) but shows equality of power. As, therefore, after saying in that other place, The Father which has sent Me bears witness of Me, He then, that they might not be over-curious about the utterance, referred them to the Scriptures; so here, that they may not entertain similar suspicions, He refers them to the Prophets, whom He continually and everywhere quotes, to show that He is not opposed to the Father.

But what of those, says some one, who were before His time? Were not they taught of God? Why then the special application of the words here? Because of old they learned the things of God by the hands of men, but now by the Only-begotten Son of God, and by the Holy Ghost. Then He adds, Not that any man has

seen the Father, save He which is of God, using this expression here not with reference to the cause, but to the manner of being. Since had He spoken in the former sense, we are all of God. And where then would be the special and distinct nature of the Son? But wherefore, says some one, did He not put this more clearly? Because of their weakness. For if when He said, I have come down from heaven, they were so offended, what would they have felt had He added this?

John 6:48

The bread of life.

He calls Himself, the bread of life, because He maintains our life both which is and which is to be, and says, Whosoever shall eat of this bread shall live forever. By bread He means here either His saving doctrines and the faith which is in Him, or His own Body; for both nerve the soul. Yet in another place He said, If a man hear My saying, he shall never taste of death. John 8:51 And they were offended; here they had no such feeling perhaps, because they yet respected Him on account of the loaves which had been made.

2. And observe how He distinguishes between His bread and the manna, by causing them to hear the result of each kind of food. For to show that the manna afforded them no unusual advantage, He added,

John 6:49

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

He then establishes a thing most likely to persuade them, that they were deemed worthy of greater things than their fathers, (meaning those marvelous men who lived in the time of Moses,) and so, after saying that they were dead who ate the manna, He adds,

Ver. 51 . He that eats of this bread, shall live forever.

Nor has He put in the wilderness without a cause, but to point out that the supply of manna was not extended to a long time, nor entered with them into the land of promise. But this bread was not of the same kind.

And the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Here one might reasonably enquire, how this was a fit season for these words, which neither edified nor profited, but rather did mischief to those who had been edified; for from that time, says the Evangelist, many of His disciples went back, saying, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? John 6:60; since these things might have been entrusted to the disciples only, as Matthew has told us that He discoursed with them apart. Mark 4:34; see Matthew 13:36 What then shall we say? What is the profit of the words? Great is the profit and necessity of them. Because they pressed upon Him, asking for bodily food, reminding Him of the food provided in the days of their forefathers, and speaking of the manna as a great thing, to show them that all those things were but type and shadow, but that the very reality of the matter was now present with them, He mentions spiritual food. But, says some one, he ought to have said, Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, but I have given you bread. But the interval between the two miracles was great, and the latter of them would have appeared inferior to the former, because the manna came down from heaven, but this, the miracle of the loaves, was wrought on earth. When therefore they sought food coming down from heaven, He continually told them, I came down from heaven. And if any one enquire

why He introduced the discourse on the Mysteries, we will reply, that this was a very fitting time for such discourses; for indistinctness in what is said always rouses the hearer, and renders him more attentive. They ought not then to have been offended, but rather to have asked and enquired. But now they went back. If they believed Him to be a Prophet, they ought to have believed His words, so that the offense was caused by their own folly, not by any difficulty in the words. And observe how little by little He led them up to Himself. Here He says that Himself gives, not the Father; The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

But, says some one, this doctrine was strange to them and unusual. And yet John at an earlier period alluded to it by calling Him Lamb. John 1:29 But for all that, they knew it not. I know they did not; nay, neither did the disciples understand. For if as yet they had no clear knowledge of the Resurrection, and so knew not what, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up John 2:19, might mean, much more would they be ignorant of what is said here. For these words were less clear than those. Since that prophets had raised men from the dead, they knew, even if the Scriptures have not spoken so clearly on the subject, but not one of them ever asserted that any man had eaten flesh. Still they obeyed, and followed Him, and confessed that He had the words of eternal life. For this is a disciple's part, not to be over-curious about the assertions of his teacher, but to hear and obey him, and to wait the proper time for the solution of any difficulties. How then, says some one, was it that the contrary came to pass, and that these men 'went back'? It was by reason of their folly. For when questioning concerning the how comes in, there comes in with it unbelief. So Nicodemus was perplexed, saying, How can a man enter into his mother's womb? So also these are confounded, saying,

Ver. 52 . How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

If you seek to know the how, why asked not you this in the matter of the loaves, how He extended five to so great a number? Because they then only thought of being satisfied, not of seeing the miracle. But, says some one, their experience then taught them. Then by reason of that experience these words ought to have been readily received. For to this end He wrought beforehand that strange miracle, that taught by it they might no longer disbelieve what should be said by Him afterwards.

3. Those men then at that time reaped no fruit from what was said, but we have enjoyed the benefit in the very realities. Wherefore it is necessary to understand the marvel of the Mysteries, what it is, why it was given, and what is the profit of the action. We become one Body, and members of His flesh and of His bones. Ephesians 5:30 Let the initiated follow what I say. In order then that we may become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh.

This is effected by the food which He has freely given us, desiring to show the love which He has for us. On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head. For this belongs to them who love strongly; this, for instance, Job implied, speaking of his servants, by whom he was beloved so exceedingly, that they desired to cleave unto his flesh. For they said, to show the strong love which they felt, Who would give us to be satisfied with his flesh?

Job 31:31 Wherefore this also Christ has done, to lead us to a closer friendship, and to show His love for us; He has given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy all their love. Let us then return from that table like lions breathing fire, having become terrible to the devil; thinking on our Head, and on the love which He

has shown for us. Parents often entrust their offspring to others to feed; but I, says He, do not so, I feed you with My own flesh, desiring that you all be nobly born, and holding forth to you good hopes for the future.

For He who gives out Himself to you here, much more will do so hereafter. I have willed to become your Brother, for your sake I shared in flesh and blood, and in turn I give out to you the flesh and the blood by which I became your kinsman. This blood causes the image of our King to be fresh within us, produces beauty unspeakable, permits not the nobleness of our souls to waste away, watering it continually, and nourishing it. The blood derived from our food becomes not at once blood, but something else; while this does not so, but straightway waters our souls, and works in them some mighty power.

This blood, if rightly taken, drives away devils, and keeps them afar off from us, while it calls to us Angels and the Lord of Angels. For wherever they see the Lord's blood, devils flee, and Angels run together. This blood poured forth washed clean all the world; many wise sayings did the blessed Paul utter concerning it in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This blood cleansed the secret place, and the Holy of Holies. And if the type of it had such great power in the temple of the Hebrews, and in the midst of Egypt, when smeared on the door-posts, much more the reality.

This blood sanctified the golden altar; without it the high priest dared not enter into the secret place. This blood consecrated priests, this in types cleansed sins. But if it had such power in the types, if death so shuddered at the shadow, tell me how would it not have dreaded the very reality? This blood is the salvation of our souls, by this the soul is washed, by this is beautiful, by this is inflamed, this causes our understanding to be more bright than fire, and our soul more beaming than gold; this blood was poured forth, and made heaven accessible.

4. Awful in truth are the Mysteries of the Church, awful in truth is the Altar. A fountain went up out of Paradise sending forth material rivers, from this table springs up a fountain which sends forth rivers spiritual. By the side of this fountain are planted not fruitless willows, but trees reaching even to heaven, bearing fruit ever timely and undecaying. If any be scorched with heat, let him come to the side of this fountain and cool his burning. For it quenches drought, and comforts all things that are burnt up, not by the sun, but by the fiery darts. For it has its beginning from above, and its source is there, whence also its water flows. Many are the streams of that fountain which the Comforter sends forth, and the Son is the Mediator, not holding mattock to clear the way, but opening our minds. This fountain is a fountain of light, spouting forth rays of truth. By it stand the Powers on high looking upon the beauty of its streams, because they more clearly perceive the power of the Things set forth, and the flashings unapproachable. For as when gold is being molten if one should (were it possible) dip in it his hand or his tongue, he would immediately render them golden; thus, but in much greater degree, does what here is set forth work upon the soul. Fiercer than fire the river boils up, yet burns not, but only baptizes that on which it lays hold. This blood was ever typified of old in the altars and sacrifices of righteous men, This is the price of the world, by This Christ purchased to Himself the Church, by This He has adorned Her all. For as a man buying servants gives gold for them, and again when he desires to deck them out does this also with gold; so Christ has purchased us with His blood, and adorned us with His blood. They who share this blood stand with Angels and Archangels and the Powers that are above, clothed in Christ's own kingly robe, and having the armor of the Spirit. Nay, I have not as yet said any great thing: they are clothed with the King Himself.

Now as this is a great and wonderful thing, so if you approach it with pureness, you approach for salvation; but if with an evil conscience, for punishment and vengeance. For, It says, he that eats and drinks unworthily of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment to himself 1 Corinthians 11:29; since if they who defile the kingly purple are punished equally with those who rend it, it is not unreasonable that they who receive the Body with unclean thoughts should suffer the same punishment as those who rend it with the nails. Observe at least how fearful a punishment Paul declares, when he says, He that despised Moses' law dies without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing? Hebrews 1:28 Take we then heed to ourselves, beloved, we who enjoy such blessings; and if we desire to utter any shameful word, or perceive ourselves hurried away by wrath or any like passion, let us consider of what things we have been deemed worthy, of how great a Spirit we have partaken, and this consideration shall be a sobering of our unreasonable passions. For how long shall we be nailed to present things? How long shall it be before we rouse ourselves? How long shall we neglect our own salvation? Let us bear in mind of what things Christ has deemed us worthy, let us give thanks, let us glorify Him, not by our faith alone, but also by our very works, that we may obtain the good things that are to come, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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