

## **Gospel Reflection on John 6:41-51** **19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B – 9<sup>th</sup> August 15'**

Perhaps some of the most difficult things for us to do are to see beyond our own belief systems - to see more deeply through and beyond our own understanding and experience - or to see that which is *extraordinary* present within what is most *ordinary* in our everyday life. The *Jews* today couldn't believe that something *from heaven* could be in their midst. They couldn't see past themselves. Are we any different today?

Jesus broke open this crippling myth of separation or division and he opened us into the revelation that *heaven* is here in this very moment and always has been. Many of us were formed believing that *heaven* was purely some kind of a reward system after our physical death – many still hold onto this belief. This image then of course also included the image of God as a punisher of those who did not deserve this reward – it was thought that these people would never know *heaven* because God would exclude them. We only need pray with a listening heart to the story of the Prodigal Son to have this myth shattered to pieces before us. This theology artificially separated us from God and left us with a corrupted image of who God is for us. We became caught in the illusion of this division but Jesus revealed to us just how wrong we were/are. Why it is so hard for us to believe in such an expansive God that is so deeply personal and yet at the same time so deeply mysterious and unknown? Evagrius of Ponticus (4C) says: *Blessed be the one who has arrived at infinite ignorance.* Are we truly open to transcend our often arrogant images and understanding of God and accept our own *infinite ignorance* in matters of God as a profound Grace?

Jesus reveals to us that there is no division between *heaven and earth* – it is all one Reality. But we often continue to live as though there is this great divide – a divide between *heaven and earth* – a divide between religions – a divide between peoples and so on. Simeon the New Theologian (10C) said "*The one who does not live eternal life here below (now) will not enjoy it later on.*"

We cannot ponder Jesus in isolation from the Christ. The Christ was the Word that breathed life into our cosmic reality from the very beginning of the formation of the cosmos. Jesus reveals to us this Christ through his life, death and resurrection – the One who has been the *bread* since the very beginning of time. Jesus opens us to what has ALWAYS been present but we never knew it until Jesus. This Christ Presence permeates all religions, all peoples and the whole cosmos. No one religion can claim Christ as their own to the exclusion of others – this is to totally misunderstand the Christ.

Too often we can relate this Gospel today solely to the *bread* of the Eucharist – we can take it all literally without contemplating its profound depths. This has led to all sorts of problems and bad theology down through the ages including justifying our exclusion of others and creating false divisions –shockingly and ignorantly done in God's name. Like the *Jews* in today's Gospel we are hooked into what we think we know and often can't or won't see or move beyond it. When we receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist it is a ritualistic invitation to *become what we eat*. To become what we eat is to be the Body of Christ both as an individual and a cosmic community – in other words it is to be/come what we already are. It is about becoming ONE with EVERYTHING in and through LOVE. Love in its every aspect is the *bread* that *comes down from heaven* and we see that so profoundly lived in Jesus. Love is so mysteriously present in

Jesus the Christ in the Eucharist but also in every other religion, every other person, and every other thing – Love never ceases breathing life into the whole cosmos. Only when we know the falsity of this illusionary separation/division that has taken its grip will we come to see something of this Christ Presence permeated in and through everything that goes far beyond our comprehension.

Ilia Delio in her book *Christ in Evolution* quotes Angela of Foligno who beautifully enters us further into this mystery through a description of one of her visions where she says:

*"I beheld the fullness of God in which I beheld and comprehended the whole of creation, that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else. And in everything that I saw, I could perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, and in a manner totally indescribable. And my soul in an excess of wonder cried out: "This world is pregnant with God!" Wherefore I understood how small is the whole of creation – that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else – but the power of God fills it all to overflowing." Page 5*

I leave you with Raimon Panikkar's words in his book *The Experience of God* where he sums what I have been trying to say: *"I arrive at God if I do not stop at myself; that is, if my deep I is transported, so to speak, into a thou (we would even say the thou of God). Otherwise, I can fall into a destructive spiritual narcissism. That is why spiritual life is dangerous, ambivalent, and constantly ambiguous. The experience of God liberates me from all fear, including the fear of the destruction of myself, the negation of myself. "It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). It is with these words that Saint Paul expresses this existential experience that what is deepest in me is Christ..... Negation should not be feared. The fear of the total negation of oneself is the evident proof that this fearful self is not the genuine and authentic thou.. Page 44*

©Annemarie Reiner