

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Corpus Christi
June 14, 2020

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Our Lord Jesus declared “I am the Bread of Life.” When He spoke to the Jews this way the Lord was up against an axiom of Jewish theology. Almighty God is pure spirit. No one has seen God at any time. And God could not take human form. There are people today who are interested in spirituality, and the morality which derives from it, but who find the concept of Christ’s Incarnation illogical and superstitious. It remains as St Paul said, “to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness. (*1Cor 1:23*) And the case can be argued with some eloquence.

But all the objections, and all the eloquent reasoning, are worthless if, as it so happened, God really did take human flesh in Jesus Christ. In St John’s Gospel, Jesus is not seen arguing with the Jews over the possibility or merits of such a happening. “The Word made flesh” is proclaiming Divine Truth in such a way that fixed notions of what can happen have to be changed.

In speaking to the Jews our Lord said the bread of God is that which cometh down out of Heaven. The Jews were okay with that. The bread of God comes down continually: in creation, in the word of prophecy, and in all the activity of God. The ancient Jews were told to never forget that God provided *manna* in the wilderness during the Exodus. But then Jesus says, “I am the Bread of Life; I am come down from Heaven.” In this way He is proclaiming that in all of history this life-giving and nourishing activity of God was Christ. And that this work became focused and visible at the Incarnation. The Bread of Life took flesh upon Himself and became man. This language parallels what was said in the opening *Prologue* of the Fourth Gospel. The “light which lighteneth every man”, at the Incarnation was seen to be God’s Own Son, coming into the world.

Many people today, objecting to the Christian gospel, might value Jesus as a prophet and wise teacher along with other such guiding lights in history who bring us close to God. But that is not the Church’s proclamation. In the California gold rush days, when people went looking for gold they often found it after reading the clues in the soil samples. They first found traces of other minerals which were tokens indicating the potential for gold nearby. We can think of the great men of history: the Old Testament prophets, some of the saints, and the wise men of other

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religions, and the Greek philosophers, as similar to these traces of minerals. When they spoke, God was nearby

But the *other* way to find gold is to find it directly. When you see it lying in a streambed it isn't thrown away as a clue leading you to something else! *Gold is gold*. It is the one substance the prospector was seeking. He doesn't look at it and say gold must be around here somewhere. He says, "*this is it.*" Christians says "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" "*This is It.*" We proclaim Christ as Son of God. He is this kind of gold, not devalued, or taken as a mere symbol, or pointing to God nearby. He is God Himself.

Christians are people learning to see God. We do this not by being at the mercy of second-hand sources, or through the medium of our own sinful and therefore distorted image. We learn to see God in Christ, Who is the "express image" of the Father (Hebrews 1:3) and the Mediator of the Father's gift of life.

During the pandemic I have been offering daily private Mass in an empty church. In normal times a sacristan has set up the altar and credence table and put the proper books out for my use. But for the past twelve weeks I have had to do all that myself. As part of the preparation every day I fill two empty cruets with water and wine. That little chore isn't part of the Mass ritual. But each and every day it is done in direct response to the most important fact in world history. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." When Jesus died on Calvary blood and water flowed from His pierced side and became the fount of the sacramental life in the Church. With the prospector finding gold, at Mass we declare, "this is It."

Christ is the bread, the living bread Who in a unique manner came down from Heaven. To eat of this bread, to receive the living Lord into our souls, so that our life is taken up into His, is to live forever. And not until we reach Heaven will we fully know all that the Sacrament of His Body and Blood has been doing for us all this time.