

**Reflection on the Gospels-20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(John 6:51-58)**

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In this week's gospel passage, we continue our reflection on John 6. John's gospel was written towards the end of the first century. The Bread of Life discourse probably reflects the interpretation of the gospel writer rather than the actual words of Jesus. This is important for making sense of statements in the discourse that would seem to be out of place from the lips of Jesus during his lifetime. The hearers of these words have lived and worshipped as followers of Jesus for some decades. They have gathered each week for the breaking of the bread and reflected deeply on the mystery of the Word made flesh, the mystery of life in Christ.

If there were eucharistic overtones subtly present in last week's gospel passage (John 6:41-51), they become quite overt as the Johannine Jesus responds to yet another objection from his opponents in this week's gospel. Like the Israelites of old in the desert wanderings, these people are more than ready to grumble: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52). Jesus does not really respond to the question "How....?" Rather, he goes on to tell those who want to hear that "life" for them depends on their eating his flesh and drinking his blood. The Johannine Jesus uses the present as well as the future tense. The life they experience in eating his flesh and drinking his blood is a present reality for them as well as a promise of on-going life. Life for the Israelites was in the blood: blood poured out meant life poured out. Clearly "life" is being used in John 6 for the quality of life the believers have come to experience through their incorporation into the community of the baptised, the sort of life that is not destroyed by death.

Life in the community unites the believers intimately with Jesus as well as with the God of Israel, whom the Johannine Jesus generally calls "Father". The first reading for today reminds us that other metaphors such as Wisdom were available to those of Jewish heritage for imaging the divine. Wisdom is a female way of imaging the divine. In John's discourse, Jesus becomes Wisdom extending an invitation to the banquet of life. We keep accepting that invitation. It is well to remember that one never enjoys a banquet alone. It is always shared with others who accept the same invitation. In the strength of the sustenance we receive in this banquet, we are also invited to bring a quality of life to all beings that struggle to exist, the human and the other-than-human. The potential for this is as boundless as the generosity of our God "enfleshed" in Jesus.