

**Reflection on the Gospel-Body and Blood of Christ Year A  
(John 6:51-58)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Bread is staple food for much of the world's population. It is also a metaphor for the food that sustains the life of the human community. Being able to "put bread on the table" is the most basic of desires. Witness the haunting images of starving "migrant workers" walking away from cities locked down for fear of pandemic, walking to their homes in rural India where they may find life-restoring "roti"!

Bread means life. Jesus' claim to be "the living bread" is a unique expression paralleled by his earlier claim to be "living water". It teases the reader with the possibility of multiple meanings. It refers, at one level, to bread sustains "ordinary" life. At another level, it is the gift of God's life (*zoē*), the life that never ends. As we reflect on the symbolism of bread, we attend also to the plight of those without bread. While there is sufficient "bread" to satisfy the hunger of everyone on the planet, over two billion people are desperately hungry, including the desperate "migrant workers" of India.

Today's gospel passage belongs within a section of John's gospel generally called the Bread of Life Discourse. Some scholars suggest that the discourse as a whole is cast in the form of a synagogue homily. In this view, it is a rabbinic type exposition of Exodus 16:4 and Psalm 78:4-5 on the manna/bread that God rains from heaven. In John 6:51-58, there are allusions to Eucharist as both meal and sacrifice. Jesus is the manna or bread from heaven. Life comes from eating his flesh/body. It also comes from drinking his blood. For the ancient Israelites, the life was in the blood. Blood poured out is life poured out. To drink the wine/blood is to participate in the life of Christ poured out.

A simple analogy from my own context might help us to grasp something of the mystery that we call Eucharist. My home town, Ballarat, is the site of the Eureka rebellion. The Eureka flag is housed in a place of honour in the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka. At one level, this flag is fabric and thread. At another, it far transcends the materials from which it is crafted. These materials were transformed, possibly by women from my own parish, into a symbol of freedom for the Eureka rebels. In the process, they changed their purpose and meaning; so too with the bread and wine of our Eucharistic celebrations. They have become, in a very real though mysterious sense, the body and blood of Christ.

This Sunday, very few of us can actually participate in a Eucharistic celebration. We can take time to pray, to reflect on the Word and on the meaning of Eucharist. While we reflect on this mystery, we ground our faith in action designed to address the issue of global hunger and the circumstances that inhibit access to "bread" for all. The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ invites us to careful consumption of the world's resources so that all God's people and all God's creatures may have life.