

## you and I are the bread of life

Posted By [cyprian](#) on Apr 20, 2021

Some years ago the supremely talented liturgical songwriter Rory Cooney wrote a very provocative text: "I am the bread of life" it starts out innocently enough. And then, "You and I are the bread of life, taken and blessed, broken and shared by Christ..." That came to my mind reading the passage from John 6 again today. [\[i\]](#)

Every now and then we can get so caught up in the literal words and facts of a story that we miss the deeper symbolic meaning. On the other hand, sometimes we can get so caught up in the symbolic meaning we neglect the literal meaning. In the case of John Chapter 6, which we hear in part today, it's impossible to separate the two--the literal meaning and the symbolic meaning. Jesus' handing himself over in service and to the will of his Father is symbolized by his handing himself over in the Eucharist and to the cross. But Jesus' handing himself over in the Eucharist and to the cross are symbols of a greater arc of self-donation. *And therefore God raised him on high and gave him the name above all other names.*

I am reminded of St. Paul's admonition at the beginning of chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans: *Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.* Paul is simply asking us to imitate Jesus whose whole life was about handing himself over, whose whole life has been eucharist, giving himself over to the will of the Father, saying nothing but what the Father gives him to say, handing himself over in compassion to the poor and the outcast, handing himself over even to death on a cross. And we are literally speaking about his *body*! I am reminded again of how the Letter to the Hebrews misquotes Psalm 40:

*... when Christ came into the world, he said,  
'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body you have prepared for me...  
Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God."* [\[ii\]](#)

Jesus the Christ says both to his God and to his followers--and by extension to us, "Here I am! Take me. Use me up. Consume me. Feed on me. I pour myself out for you."

And here today we also have the story of Stephen serving as an icon of those members of the early church who are now building lives based on the example of Jesus, trying to be like Jesus.<sup>[iii]</sup> There are actually two martyrdoms that proceed Stephen's red martyrdom, shedding his blood, as if his red martyrdom too is simply a culmination of a whole life of self-offering. The first martyrdom was the martyrdom of service. Stephen was one of the first seven men selected by the Church to distribute food to the poor, an office that inspired the order of deacons. He handed himself over to be of service. Secondly, given the evidence of the long discourse he gives in Acts, we can assume that he wasn't afraid to speak the truth even to the powerful people of the Sanhedrin, or to put it another way, to let the Word flow through him. (*No longer I, but Christ who lives within me.*<sup>[iv]</sup>) It is this very speech that gets him accused of blasphemy, which he had to have known might happen. So there is a martyrdom too, a real witness--having the courage to speak the truth to power. And then finally his death itself, when he exhibits that most Christ-like moment--saying to Jesus what Jesus had said to the Father before he dies, '*Receive my spirit*' (echoed in Psalm 31 which is used as a responsorial psalm today), and then forgiving his killers.

And so for us: how do we imitate the self-offering of Jesus, the self-offering of Stephen? How can we *offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God*?

We speak so often about and focus on our oneness with God in the contemplative tradition. However I read something the other day in an Indian text that got my attention and puts that union with God in context and perspective, which I will paraphrase a bit here: the spiritual life *starts* with union with God. Raimundo Panikkar says it this way, "I and the Father are one' to the extent that my ego disappears, and my ego disappears to the extent that it allows itself to be shared by whosoever comes to me, 'feeds' on me... I am one with the source insofar as I too act

as a source by making everything which I have received flow again--just like Jesus."[\[v\]](#)

May I also something from St. Benedict. Just as the folks in the Acts of the Apostles are trying to imitate Jesus, so Benedict is trying to imitate Acts. And he tells us in the Rule, twice, once in Chapter 33 on "the evil practice of private ownership": *even your bodies are not your own anymore* (immediately after which he quotes Acts 4); and the other time in Chapter 58, after the monk makes vows, *from that day he will not have even his own body as his own*. We give ourselves over to the Rule of life and obedience. But of course, as I always like to point out, that obedience in the Rule is not just to the Rule and the abbot (or prior): it's *mutual* obedience. We give ourselves over to charity and care for each other over our own needs. That's backed up again in the Tools for Good Works (chapter 4), when Benedict urges us not only to renounce ourselves and discipline our bodies, but also to *relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and bury the dead. Go to help the troubled and console the sorrowing.*[\[vi\]](#) We empty ourselves completely and hand ourselves over to whatever it is that God wants to do with us. As far as I am concerned this is what the Third Good of our charism is all about, as I like to call it, absolute availability. What do you need of me, God? What do you need of me, brother, sister? What do you need of me Church, world? What do you need of our community, Church, world? Into your hands I commend my spirit. Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will.

"I myself and the bread of life," Jesus says.

But "You and I are the bread life," too,

"Taken and blessed,

Broken and shared by Christ that the world might live."

Or as Pope Saint Leo the Great put it: "Change us into what we receive."

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P.S. Today we heard the news that Derek Chauvin was found guilty of all three charges--two counts of murder and one count of manslaughter--in the death of George Floyd last year. It is poignant to think of this in light of

Stephen's martyrdom that we heard about today, when he, like Jesus from the cross, excuses his persecutors. I was reminded of the Jurgen Moltmann quote (for which I cannot find the source!) that Jesus "first died for the victims and then died for the executioners," and in so doing he revealed a new justice that "breaks the Infernal circle of hatred and vengeance, and creates from both the victims and the executioners a new human race endowed with a new humanity." And that's what we are called to do and to be in this violent world too, we followers of Jesus, the ones who finally break the Infernal circle of hatred and vengeance. That applies to our petty little squabbles as well as grand gestures. We are the ones who are the first of this new human race endowed with a new humanity. So as we pray for the repose of the soul of George Floyd and for his family, let's also remember Derek Chauvin and his family who must be devastated as well. And pray just as ardently that we could be among those who break that Infernal circle.

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[i] Jn 6:30-35.

[ii] Heb 10:4-7.

[iii] Acts 7:51-8:1a

[iv] Gal 2:20.

[v] *Christophany*, 115-116.

[vi] RB 4:10-19