

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time “Remedy for Doubt and Fear”

Fr. Frank Schuster

Thank you for putting up with my absence last weekend. I was at a family reunion. It was a very special one given that most of us haven't seen each other for a couple years. In addition to my absence, last weekend also ended up being the feast of the Assumption. Our five-week series on the Bread of Life discourse was therefore interrupted. Never fear though! If you are interested in part 4, you can read or watch it on my website “fatherfrankschuster.com” (pardon the shameless plug). To catch us up, in Part 4 of the Bread of Life Discourse I talked about a pilgrimage site in New Mexico called Chimayo. The story is, about two hundred years ago on a Good Friday, a rancher by the name of Don Bernardo was on his knees praying on a hill on his property during the night. While he was praying, he noticed a brilliant glow coming from the ground from the other side of his property. He was awestruck by this and decided to check it out. When he got to the spot, the glow was gone but his feet tripped on a hole there and noticed that there was something buried in the hole. Reaching down, he found himself lifting a beautiful wood carved crucifix. He rejoiced in his discovery by bringing the cross back to his house on the other end of the property and gave it a place of honor in his home.

The next morning however the crucifix was gone! Where did it go? The next time he was walking about, he decided to check out the hole where he originally found the crucifix, and lo and behold, the crucifix was there. This happened several times before it was clear God was asking him to build a church on that site, which he did, and this church has been there now for about two hundred years with the crucifix proudly displayed above the altar. On the side of the church there is a room with the hole where the crucifix was found. Pilgrims around the country make their way to Chimayo because healings have been associated with the dirt taken from the ground there. In fact, there is a room where pilgrims have left their crutches behind in thanksgiving.

That is the story in a nutshell; however, there is more to the story of my trip that I want to share with you this final weekend of the Bread of Life discourse. You see, as my car was getting closer to Chimayo, I checked my hotel app on my smartphone to see where I should stay. The cheapest place to stay was in Los Alamos nearby so that is where I booked two nights. And I think the Holy Spirit was responsible for that because the juxtaposition between Chimayo and Los Alamos was striking.

You see, people go to Chimayo because from the ground comes healing. In Los Alamos, a doomsday weapon was created from material found in the ground. When Oppenheimer saw the fruits of his work he famously said, “I have become death, the destroyer of worlds.” Obviously, the history of Los Alamos is quite complicated, lots to be debated about it. However, for someone like me on a

pilgrimage, I was just struck by the contrast between the two towns, “from the earth comes life” and “from the earth comes death”. In my prayer, I wondered if the story of Chimayo and Los Alamos was also the story of the human heart. You see, in every human heart there is holy ground that brings forth healing and life. However, there is also a place in every human heart that is radioactive, destructive, and toxic.

My friends, every three years the Church spends five weekends with John chapter 6. It is a chapter of the bible that presents to us the most advanced treatment of the Holy Eucharist. Look where we have been! The Bread of Life Discourse began with the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The people were so amazed that they wanted to make him king. He put food in our belly, let’s put him in charge. As a result, Jesus left them. He wants to be our savior, not a political ruler. The next Sunday, the story continued with the people finding Jesus back in Capernaum. Jesus taught them to stop working for food that perishes but rather to work for food that endures for eternal life. We were invited to stop being so preoccupied with earthly concerns. The third Sunday, the drama heated up when the multiplication of the loaves was compared to the bread from heaven that the Jews ate with Moses in the desert. More than that, Jesus said “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” In the fourth Sunday of the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus continued to elaborate his startling claim that he was greater than Moses by saying, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” And, even more startling, Jesus said, “Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”

Jesus therefore made it very clear to the people listening to him that he was greater than Moses and that he was, in fact, the Son of God. Like Bishop Barron sometimes likes to say, Jesus’ unambiguous claim in passages like today can only lead us to one of two conclusions: either Jesus is who he says he is, and we should be on our knees, or Jesus is a liar and a very bad man, someone to be opposed. And so, at the conclusion of John chapter 6, the gospel tells us that many of Jesus’ disciples said, “This saying is hard. Who can accept it?” The Gospel also tells us that, “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.”

My friends, in every human heart, there is holy ground that gives healing and life, bringing us closer the Jesus and the Church. However, there is also a place in every human heart that is radioactive, destructive, full of doubts and fears. What is the remedy to the toxicity in the world around us that builds up in our hearts and weighs heavy day after day on our souls? The answer is the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Only Jesus can save us. Only Jesus can be our holy ground that gives us healing and life. The more we receive Christ into our hearts in the Blessed Sacrament, the less influenced we become by what’s toxic in our world.

More than that: when we receive Christ, we are then called to be Christ because we are what we eat. As a Eucharistic People, we are called to go forth from these doors and participate in what theologian Teilhard de Chardin called the transubstantiation of the world. What holds us back all too often is the constant war going on in our all too human hearts and the temptation to succumb to fear and doubt. It is therefore appropriate that we conclude the Bread of Life Discourse with the question Jesus poses to the Twelve. As the crowd dissipated in disbelief, Jesus asks them, “Do you also want to leave?” Simon Peter answers for the Church and indeed for all of us, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”