For Personal Reflection

?

1. What does it mean to me that Jesus is the Bread of Life?
2. What is my understanding of Francis de Sales' understanding of the role that the bread from heaven can play in my life right here on earth?
3. How can the celebration of Eucharist and the reception of communion help to preserve and strengthen me?
4. What impact should my reception of the bread of heaven have upon my thoughts? My feelings? My attitudes? My actions?
5. Are there any reasons at this point in my life that I may be reluctant to make full and frequent use of this Sacrament? What are they? How might they make me hesitate before approaching this excellent banquet on a regular basis?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching. Vincent Kerns, MSFS. S.F.S. Printing School. India: Visakhapatnam, 1976.

Introduction to the Devout Life. St. Francis de Sales. Translated by John K. Ryan. Image Books, Doubleday. 1989. Part II, Chapters 20—21.

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Bread From Heaven

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Food on Earth

In a sermon given as a young priest (June 1594), Francis de Sales challenges us to consider both the great and glorious and generous gift that is the Eucharist and to contemplate our need to frequently avail ourselves of its power to sustain and nourish us.

"He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, lives continually in me, and I in him. These words were spoken by the One who is the blessed fruit of Mary's womb. If we are not used to eating this fruit, let us heed our Lord's warning: You can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood. Death came to our first parents because they ate that which was forbidden; by contrast, death will come to us if we fail to eat what is commanded."

"All too frequently many people make the mistake of believing that this offer applies only to heaven or exclusively to the next life. This fullness of life is available to us now, today—every day…"

Drawing from the story of Creation in the Book of Genesis, Francis is perplexed by the impact that the serpent's invitation had upon Adam and Eve—and, by extension, upon us—as compared to our seemingly lukewarm response to Christ's invitation: "If the serpent's invitation had so much influence with Adam and Eve, isn't it astounding that our Lord's invitation has so little effect on us? Surely the invitation to be among the guests of so great a Lord should excite us to go out of respect as to accept the honor...What is more, the banquet is excellent. The food is the most precious there is…"

"The bread from heaven does not receive a share in the life of the person who eats it: it gives life itself—life to the soul—preserving life, because it is life itself…"

Francis observed: "Our lord looks down on the people of this world and gives them bread to refresh them on their journey to heaven...the bread from heaven feeds everyone, everywhere: it provides eternal life."

In particular, Francis de Sales challenges us to consider two things about bread. "The first thing is to notice about bread is that it preserves life: This is the purpose for the bread from heaven...but there are two big differences between the bread from heaven and earthly bread. Earthly bread supports life by being changed from something dead into something living by the person who eats it: the bread supports the life it receives. By contrast, the bread from heaven does not receive a share in the life of the person who eats it: it gives life itself—life to the soul—preserving life, because it is life itself. The spark of life in the soul (which is charity) and the breath of that life (which is grace) need restoring from time to time: this is the purpose of the heavenly banquet. While ordinary bread is changed into us when we eat it, the bread from heaven changes us into itself."

"The second thing to notice about bread is that it renews strength. The psalms speak of bread that will prevent one's strength from failing. Here again, there are two differences between earthly bread and the bread from heaven. Ordinary bread strengthens us from internal dissolution, but not from external assaults. The bread from heaven strengthens us in both ways."

In the Gospel of John (10:10), Jesus tells us that he came to earth in order that we might have life to the full. Jesus, the bread of life, came down from heaven in order that we might have life more abundantly. All too frequently many people make the mistake of believing that this offer applies only to heaven or exclusively to the next life. This fullness of life is available to us now, today—every day—in the bread of heaven, the Body and Blood of Jesus, broken, poured and shared to both preserve us on this earth and to strengthen us along this earth.

"You can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man...Death came to our first parents because they ate that which was forbidden; death will come to us if we fail to eat what is commanded."

We've all heard the expression, "You are what you eat." What might be your reason for receiving the bread of heaven today? How might you need to be preserved today? For what or for whom might you need to be strengthened today?

Jesus—the Bread of Life—is ours for the taking, is ours for the asking, is our for the living.

What are we waiting for?