

Jesu Juva

“Come. Eat. Live.”

Text: John 6:35-51 (Ephesians 4:17-5:2; 1 Kings 19:1-8)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I had the opportunity to have some good conversations with Bishop Omolo of Kenya this week. We talked about all sorts of things, and one of the things we talked about was **food**. He's been in the United States some five weeks now, traveling about, thanking donors and trying to raise awareness of the struggle many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are enduring - especially the widows and orphans. After five weeks, he said, he was ready to go home. And one of the things he missed the most was the food. American food is good, he said, but very different, very heavy, and so he had gained some weight. And then we talked about the food I remembered eating when I was there - the pineapple, how amazingly sweet and juicy it was; so much better than the ones we get here. And the small sweet bananas they have there. He couldn't wait to go home and have "his" food again.

And then I got to thinking: I wonder if Adam and Eve had thoughts like that? Memories of the food they had in the Garden before they were stupid and ruined it all. When they weren't satisfied with all the food God had given them and wanted more, *just one more*. Adam lived some 900 years after that horrible day, every year of it spent working for his food - tilling, planting, weeding, harvesting, grinding, baking, toiling under a hot sun with a now uncooperative soil. I wonder if he and Eve ever reminisced . . . about how good it was, how sweet and abundant the fruit, and how they would probably give anything to go back again. To undo what they had done and enjoy that bounty once more. But they couldn't. Their sin had made that impossible.

Maybe you have some memories like that . . . from your childhood, or another time past, food that your mother or father or grandmother or grandfather made, or from a vacation .

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So what if you could? What if we all could? Go back. Go back to such food. Or, have food that maybe you never had before and had only heard of - but here's the offer. Come! Let's go. I'll take you there. I'll give it to you. And you won't believe it. I cannot even begin to tell you how good it is . . .

Well that's what Jesus is saying today. The verses in the Holy Gospel are continuing Jesus' teaching of the crowd after He fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish, and after they chased after Him and found Him the next day on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Last week He told them to stop chasing after food that perishes; food that

is here today and gone tomorrow, and that you will eat until you die; post-sin-Adam food. There's a *better* food that Jesus has come to bring. ***I am the bread of life***, He said. Bread that doesn't just sustain the life you already have, but bread that gives the life you need.

And today we learn more about that as we continue with Jesus' teaching. He says: I have food for you so that you will ***never hunger*** again, and ***never thirst*** again. Or in other words, for your every need to be satisfied, as it was in the beginning. I've come to bring it to you, and to take you to it on the last day. To take you back home, to Paradise. Your parents were cast out of the Garden, out of Paradise, and into the wilderness. I have come to take you in the wilderness back to Paradise again. Not just to feed you here in the wilderness; not just to make your life a bit more tolerable here, for a time. But to restore what was lost. To take you back again. And then, ***raised on the last day*** and restored to what once was, you will ***never be cast out***. For whoever comes to me, whoever comes with me, Jesus says, will ***never be cast out***. ***I am this bread of life***. This is the reason my Father sent me. To give ***life to the world***.

For to Adam it was said: eat of this tree and die. But ***truly, truly***, Jesus says, ***if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever***. The Tree of Life, back on earth again. So what do you say? Sounds like a good deal.

Well here's what the Jews said: *You can't do that*. We know who you are. We know where you're from - you came down from Nazareth, not heaven. We know your Mom and Dad. You're like us. You're in this world, this *wilderness*, with us. Jesus, your words are writing checks your body can't cash!

Except Jesus *could* do that. He *would* do that. And He *did* do that. Because His body, His flesh, *would write the check* to pay the debt of sin on the cross. He provides life for the world because He takes the sin of the world upon Himself. All the life-stealing sin of the world robs Him of His life, so with the wages of sin paid with His death, life could reign again. And we see that it did with His resurrection. A resurrection to life He provides for us. Yes, He says, ***I will raise him up*** - I will raise you up - ***on the last day***. Death defeated and sin forgiven. For ***I am the bread of life***. With me, in me, you have life.

Yet just as the Jews didn't believe, so satan is constantly tempting us not to believe either. Hissing to us, as he did to Adam and Eve, that life is found over here, in something else. That you don't need that bread; have this bread instead. It's better. *Really*. Trust me. And many listen - we so often listen! - and look for life where it cannot be found. Tasting what we should not taste; forbidden fruit. Looking for life in the things of this world, looking for life in ourselves and we can accomplish, looking for life all over the place in the latest fads and promises of the world, rather than where it really is - in Christ, the bread of life. Which is to be, as Paul said, ***like the Gentiles***, like unbelievers. Acting like them, like everyone else; like there's no difference. ***Hard of***

heart, dark of mind, calloused, futile. Futile, like a hamster trying to get someplace running on its wheel. Futile, like trying to go up the down escalator.

But, Paul says, *that is not the way you learned Christ!* That's not who you are. That is not what you learned of baptism, where you died and rose with Christ; where the Father made you His child; and where the Spirit has given you the forgiveness of your sins and a new life.

And that is not what you learned here as you receive the forgiveness of sins. That coming here with a burdened and troubled conscience, Jesus gives you peace with His absolution. That for all your sin for which you should be cast out, you receive the Father's welcome instead. For Jesus was cast out for you, that you never be; that you have life.

And that is not what you learned as you hear the words of Jesus proclaiming: *This is My Body, This is My Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.* Here is food for your hunger and drink for your thirst. Here is Jesus **come down from heaven** and giving Himself and all that He is and all that He has to you. That you live now. That you live forever. For the one who **gave His flesh for the life of the world** here gives His Body and Blood to give life to you.

Yet just as the Jews in Jesus' day, so satan is saying today: *these things can't do that!* We know what these things are, we know where they come from, from the tap, from the store, from the traditions of men, not from heaven.

Don't be fooled, persuaded, deceived, or misled. That man from Nazareth was more than just a man, and these things are more than just things. For the Word and promise of God make them more than just what meets the eye. This water, these words, this bread and wine, are bread of life. This water, these words, this bread and wine are exactly what you need. This water, these words, this bread and wine are the food we need not to get to the mountain of God, like Elijah, but are the food from the mountain of God, from that mountain called Golgotha, to give us the life we need. To refresh us, to sustain us, to strengthen us. To soften our hard hearts, enlighten our dark minds, to open our deaf ears and blind eyes, and give us Christ.

That's the food that's here for you, served over and over. Food from your true home and that takes you home - from sin to righteousness, from wilderness to heaven. So that on the last day of your sojourn, you will be raised up from death to life and live forever. And then home, the real feast will begin: the feast that has no end; the marriage feast of the Lamb. Jesus wants you there at that feast, and so He comes here now to this feast, that you feast on Him. For as He said: ***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*** Yes, the good, sweet, life-giving Tree of Life, back on earth again!

Come. Eat. Live.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.