READINGS: 1 Kings 19:4-8 / Ephesians 4:30-5:2/ John 6:41-51
**Theme:** **The Bread That I Will Give Is My Flesh**
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

Today’s gospel reading is a continuation of St. John the Evangelist’s narration of Jesus’ encounter with the crowd after the multiplication of loaves of bread and fish to feed them. After Jesus had stated that He is the **bread of life** (*cf*. last Sunday’s homily), he went on to say that “**the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh**” (John 6:51). By linking the **bread** of life with **his flesh**, Jesus was alluding to his sacrificial death on the cross.

JESUS IS BREAD OF LIFE THROUGH HIS SACRIFICE

A statement by St. Ignatius (AD 45-107), the third Bishop of Antioch and a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, could help us appreciate what Jesus means by saying that the **bread of life is his flesh**. In the year AD 107, St. Ignatius was condemned by Emperor Trajan to be devoured by wild beasts in the Coliseum. Courageously anticipating his crushing or cruel death, St. Ignatius said: “I am the **wheat** of the Lord and must be ground by the teeth of wild beasts to become the pure **bread** of the Lord Jesus Christ” (A. J. M. Mausolfe & J. K. Mausolfe, *Saints Companions for Each Day* [St. Pauls: Mumbai, 2005], p. 393). In other words, just as grains of wheat have to be ground to produce bread, so St. Ignatius accepted the painful process of martyrdom at the mercy of the wild beasts in order to be crowned by the Lord.

The above usage of the word “**wheat**” to describe the painful death of St. Ignatius should remind us of Jesus’ own figurative description of his sacrificial death: “**Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,** it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (John 12:24). Therefore, in saying that the bread (made of “wheat”) that he would give is his flesh, Jesus was also referring to his sacrificial death by which the Father gives new and eternal life to all who believe. In other words, Jesus’ flesh can be offered us only through his death (on the cross) by which we receive eternal life.

THE MASS AS MEMORIAL OF THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS

On the night before his sacrificial death, Jesus offered us bread as his broken body (flesh) and wine as his blood which seals the new covenant: “**this is my body**…. **this is my blood**, the **blood of the covenant** which is **poured out for many**”for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 14:22-26). Thus, the Holy Eucharist that Christ instituted the night before his death is **closely linked** **with the actual sacrificial death** which occurred the following day. Hence, since he says that we should celebrate the Eucharist in memory of him, it means that anytime we celebrate it, the sacrifice of Calvary is re-presented.

Beloved, already at the Last Supper Jesus Christ had all of us in mind (as it is very obvious in his priestly prayer, when he said: “Father I pray not only for these [disciples], but for all those who would come to believe through them” (John 17:20). Jesus, concerned that you and I would not be at Calvary, and even if we were there would not have understood why he was dying such a painful and humiliating death, instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, so that anytime we celebrate it the redemptive merits of his sacrifice would be made available to us again. Hence, St. Paul says: “whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup **you proclaim the death of the Lord** until he comes again” (1 Cor. 11:26). In short, then, the Holy Mass perpetually makes present for us the sacrificial death of Jesus and its redemptive merits.

With the above explanation in mind, let us pray that:

* We will attend every Mass with the right disposition of faith;
* We will experience at every Mass the fruits of the redemptive death of Christ:
	+ His most holy body will strengthen us in spirit;
	+ His most precious blood will wash away our sins;
	+ His most precious blood will redeem and protect us from evil; and
	+ We will be sanctified unto eternal life. Amen!