

A painting depicting a man in a purple robe standing in a room with several lions. The scene is set in a stone-walled room, possibly a prison or a place of confinement. The man is looking towards the lions. The overall tone is somber and dramatic.

Courageous living in



threatening times

15<sup>th</sup> August 2021

# extraordinary season

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot gather again today, due to Covid cases in our local area, and the necessary lock downs and restrictions, required to ensure our protection as communities to bring this latest outbreak to an end.

This temporary of sacrifice of the isolation from loved ones, from each other and the disruptions to normal daily lives and plans we may have!

All may be stressful and dare I say maybe a cause for a feeling of despair!

However, I pray, that the re-assurance of the "eternal life giving" Gospel message, today, from St John, that Jesus, "the bread of life", is the only one we are to feed on, that continues to feed us spiritually, especially in this pandemic as we live out our Christian Community in Action in our environments!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I don't know about you, but preparing today's message has truly uplifted my spirit, especially the words from Holy Scripture,

**<sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'**

Back in November 1990, I did my Cursillo Weekend, and the theme song chosen, was "I am the Bread of life", The opening lines are:-

***I am the Bread of life, He who comes to Me shall not hunger,  
He who believes in Me shall not thirst.***

The words of this Hymn "fanned into flame" the gift of Holy Spirit inside me, that resonates and encourages me to keep going, through all the many trials that the gift of life brings!

The last verse started ""Yes Lord we believe, that you are the Christ"

I said back then Yes Lord I believe!

And that's the encouragement I take from today's message! Have you noticed that in today's modern western culture we are very aware, that not all foods are the same, and some are harmful with additives causing food allergies to food that might normally be thought nutritious? The saying "You are what you eat", is that applicable to us?

Do we spend a lot of time worrying, researching, about where the next meal is coming from?

- Was it grown organically?
- Was it grown near a highway, power station or coal mine?
- Is the detailed list of ingredients on canned or package foods correct?
- Does the deceptive presentation mask the slow pollutants it contains?
- Has it been genetically modified?
- And the list goes on!

Surely, we are aware of cultures, such as in what is described as the 3<sup>rd</sup> World, where the vast majority don't have that luxury of food we have, their version of the saying is "You are if you eat?"

I remember being taught about Maslow's theory of the "hierarchy of needs", that food has been one of the main obsessions of human beings. So with this in mind, let us delve into today's gospel passage.

Let's look at the historic background of today's passage.

The Jewish culture into which Jesus spoke was very sensitive to issues of food, and they knew that their God was very interested in food! The people of Israel practiced not just by the rituals and taboos that surrounded the preparing of their food, but also by a lot of other things. They knew that God had himself provided food for them in the desert, when they were about to starve. They also knew that for certain of his servants, like Elijah the Tishbite, God sent his creatures to bring them food.

From the book of Genesis, food had been the cause of their separation from God, as Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and that food, as symbolized by the Passover meal, set them apart as the people whom God himself chose and brought out of slavery. Jesus's eating habits were already causing "raised eyebrows" as he was indiscriminating in whom he ate with. (Mark 2.15ff, for example)

Consequently, a religious leader teaching to the people like this, about food, would be part of how they assessed his message. Can you imagine, how their suspicions, that are already slightly raised, would now be alarmed when Jesus says this particularly disgusting and outrageous thing!

They cannot cope with this horrible idea which is outrageous in Jewish belief. They remain at the level of the purely physical and they imagine that Jesus is speaking of some form of cannibalism with all the horror of human flesh and, greatest of all outrages for Jews, the spilling of human blood: 'how can this man give us his flesh to eat' (v. 52)

I recall a Hindu teaching colleague of mine, back in my teaching days, understood Christianity this way. We, who are so used in reading Jesus's words as reference to the Eucharist, may not hear the full and shocking impact of what he says.

But John's Gospel makes it completely clear that his words caused major ripples and lost him some followers. We need to remind ourselves that Jesus is not an optional extra. Jesus is life, the only possible source of it.

The real world is fed only by Jesus, created in him, redeemed by him and sustained through him alone. We are wholly dependent upon the life of Jesus, which is the life of God the source of all life. We need always to remember that God has provided a secure eternal future for us. God ultimately works all things so that we would not lose our heavenly inheritance for we are heirs.

The inheritance is the kingdom of God and it is ours. Christ secured an eternal future for his people that is as certain as the bread we eat and wine we drink when we celebrate his death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper.

When times are uncertain and we are tempted to worry – a situation with which we are currently familiar - reflect on this certainty, that our God is a God who is always in control and who never lies or deceives us.

Our comfort through uncertainty is God's unfailing and faithful love. He loves us and cares for us enough to faithfully bring us through this life into his kingdom, as he did for his Son through the resurrection.

Let us joyfully, and with a spirit of hope, continue our stewardship responsibilities to each other and the environment we live in. **Amen**