

We must look beyond the bread to what it symbolises, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, Corpus Christi. Food/bread is the conduit Jesus chose to communicate God's love but also his abiding presence with his own. When we eat the food that is Jesus with faith in our minds and hope in our hearts, we are given a foretaste of eternal life. Today we have the good fortune to hear the word spoken to Elijah, 'Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you. (1 Kings 19)

REFLECTION 2: COME, EAT, LIVE!

Emperor Chin was the Chinese Emperor during whose reign the Great Wall of China, extending over 2,000 miles was constructed. It is the only man-made structure on earth that can be identified by astronauts from outer space. But Emperor Chin had one great fear - one day he would have to die. His courtiers had informed him of some island in the Eastern Sea where its inhabitants had discovered the secret of eternal life. However, in spite of Chin's offer of priceless gifts to trade in return for their secret, the islanders refused to divulge their recipe.

From the beginning of time people had dreamed about never dying - of living forever, eternal life. With each death of a loved one, that dream became more and more an obsession with people. And so, when Jesus showed up in Palestine and began talking about eternal life, people flocked to hear what he had to say. Since the time of Abraham and Moses, Jews were in the dark about what happened to the dead. They believed that there was an 'abode of the dead, a land of shadows' but they had no idea what that world was like, so any light that Jesus could shed on the subject was welcome.

One of the most remarkable things that Jesus said about eternal life is found in today's Gospel, 'I am the bread of life...that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he (she) will live forever. The bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world' (John 6: 41-51). Jesus made it known that life in this world isn't the end of things. There's another life to come and that life will never end - it is eternal everlasting life. So, it is no wonder that many Jews shook their heads at Jesus especially when he said, 'I am the bread that comes down from heaven'. So they grumbled among themselves saying, 'Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph? Do we not know his parents, so how can he claim he came down from heaven?' It was only when Jesus rose from the dead that many Jews reconsidered his words and took him seriously.

We have gathered here today to hear the words of Jesus about eternal life - to be nourished by this body, the bread of eternal life. What Emperor Chin sought in the paradise islands of the Eastern Sea is with us here today - Jesus Christ the Son of God, the wellspring of eternal life. Vatican 2 reminds us that Jesus is with us in his spirit when he said to his followers, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them'. Jesus is also with us in his word; what he said over 2,000 years ago to the people is what he says to us today. Jesus is also with us in his representative, the priest. Speaking to his representatives Jesus said, 'Whoever listens to you, listens to me'. Finally, Jesus is with us in the sacrament of eternal life. It was concerning this sacrament that he said, 'I am the bread of life...if anyone eats this bread that person will live forever'. In the light of all this is it any wonder that Jesus said to us, 'How fortunate you are to see the things you see. I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but they could not, to hear what you hear, but they did not'. As always in John's Gospel, faith is not so much about truths and beliefs but about the person of Jesus. Pope Francis reminds us that it is the caring and merciful Christ who must be our guide to Christian living - the Jesus who took pity on the crowds; Jesus broken and bloodied who poured himself out for the life of the world.