

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

OFFENSIVE LOVE

John 6:56-69

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” 59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. 65 And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67 So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”[a]

DIAGNOSIS: Beggars? Us? No Way!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Our Life Is Our Own

We don't like to be dependent on anyone, beholden to anyone, or in anyone's debt. We like to insist that we are self-made, self-sufficient, and the source of our life. When Jesus says that we live because of him, we find that offensive. We don't buy it.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Trust the Life We Claim as Our Own

"The flesh is useless," says Jesus. That's not the way we see it. As far as we're concerned the things of the flesh are pretty useful, nifty, and worthwhile. We trust the flesh; it is tangible, predictable, and in our control. Trusting the Spirit to give us life seems risky.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We Turn Away

Because we cannot hear the words of Jesus regarding the flesh, we turn back to the things that we'd left behind when we followed Christ. In so doing we are increasingly estranged from Christ. The words of eternal life become only a faint memory, and too late we realize that we are dependent on God.

PROGNOSIS: Beggars We Are

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God Gives Food to Beggars

Like the hungry on the mountainside that were fed with five loaves and two fish, the Holy One of God continues to feed us with the words of eternal life. The bread of life comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and the Father continues to draw us back to this Life-giving One. The Bread of Life is broken for us on the Cross, and we who had no food, no life, and no faith are reborn and nourished.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): We Trust the Life We Have Been Given

We now recognize that there is no one else to whom we can go who will give us eternal life, save Jesus. Our testimony has become that we follow the Holy One of God who has restored us to life. We rejoice that we are found in the company of those who have been fed with the Bread of Life.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Our Life Is Found in Christ

We acknowledge and celebrate our dependence on Christ. As Luther said, "We are beggars all," and in that rejoice. We live in gratitude and praise for all God has done, eager to share the life of Christ with others who hunger as we do.