

Introduction

In today's gospel many people take offense at Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood; even many of Jesus' disciples peel off. This is the backdrop in John's gospel for Peter's confession of faith. "To whom can we go?" asks Peter, in words we sometimes sing just before the gospel is read. "You have the words of eternal life." In order to take such a stand, as Peter and Joshua did, Paul tells us to arm ourselves with the word of God. We pray in the Spirit that we might be bold ambassadors of the gospel.

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, your word feeds your people with life that is eternal. Direct our choices and preserve us in your truth, that, renouncing what is false and evil, we may live in you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem and put the ark of the covenant there. This passage includes part of the prayer Solomon prays at the dedication of the temple. He prays for the fulfillment of God's promises to David and for God to hear the prayers of all the faithful.

¹Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. ⁶Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ¹⁰And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

²²Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' ²⁶Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed,

which you promised to your servant my father David.

²⁷“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! ²⁸Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

⁴¹“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name ⁴²—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.”

Psalm 84

¹How dear to me | is your dwelling,
O | LORD of hosts!

**²My soul has a desire and longing for the courts | of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the | living God.**

³Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest where she may | lay her young,
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my king | and my God.

**⁴Happy are they who dwell | in your house!
They will always be | praising you.**

⁵Happy are the people whose strength | is in you,
whose hearts are set on the | pilgrims’ way.

**⁶Those who go through the balsam valley will find it a | place of springs,
for the early rains have covered it with | pools of water.**

⁷They will climb from | height to height,
and the God of gods will be | seen in Zion.

**⁸LORD God of hosts, | hear my prayer;
give ear, O | God of Jacob.**

⁹Behold our defend- | er, O God;
and look upon the face of | your anointed.

¹⁰For one day in your courts is better than a | thousand elsewhere.

I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents | of the wicked.

¹¹For the LORD God is both sun and shield, bestowing | grace and glory;
no good thing will the LORD withhold from those who walk | with integrity.

**¹²O | LORD of hosts,
happy are they who put their | trust in you! R**

Second Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Like a general giving a rousing speech to troops before battle, this letter closes by calling on Christians to be equipped for spiritual warfare against evil. The full armor of God includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the gift of salvation, and the word of God inspired by the Spirit.

¹⁰Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Gospel Reading: John 6:56-69

The “hard saying” that offends Jesus’ disciples is his claim that his followers must eat his flesh and drink his blood. The followers who return to their old lives know something about how odd this sounds. Simon Peter, on the other hand, knows something about the scarcity of living, gracious words. He asks the most important question: “To whom shall we go?”

[Jesus said,] ⁵⁶“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But 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. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

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

Prayers of Intercession

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying "God in your mercy," and responding, "hear our prayer."

A brief silence.

God of courage, bless all leaders of your church. Make them ready to proclaim the gospel of peace and strengthen them to preach your loving word. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of creation, bless fields and orchards. Protect the land from drought and bring life-giving rain to support growth. Instruct your people in wise treatment of the world you have provided for all your creatures. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of community, bless all who seek justice between nations and peoples. Give guidance to bridge-builders, heal divisions, and inspire cooperation in times of crisis, disaster, and war. Help us in our way forward as we acknowledge truths of harms and hurts of the past with our First Nations, in Canada. Guide us so we might love our neighbour more fully; show us how we are connected, that we might reconcile and build relationships that are truly caring. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of compassion, bless all who are in any need. Accompany all who are lonely and feeling abandoned and remind them of your abiding presence. Accompany all who are persecuted and exploited and open us to their cries. Be with those who struggle with illness (*especially those who we name aloud, or silently on our hearts, at this time...* [pause]) God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of change, bless our transitions. Guide all who are embarking on new stages in life such as a new job, new school, or new community. Sustain enduring friendships and kindle new relationships and interests. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of comfort, bless all who mourn the deaths of their beloved ones. We give you thanks for the saints who have gone before us. Renew our confidence in your promise of resurrection and life in the world to come. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost...

Who Can Accept It?

“This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” (John 6:60). Jesus’ teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood isn’t something we can figure out and accept on our own. In his explanation of the third article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther writes these often-quoted and memorized words: “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” The question of accepting Jesus’ difficult teachings gets turned on its head. No one can accept it. The good news of Jesus is too radical, unsettling, and illogical for us to accept. Through the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit we are able to echo Peter’s profession of faith: “You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). Like Peter, we have come to believe—despite our doubts and weakness of faith—through the Spirit’s work in the word.

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