



Chapter 3

Receiving the Sacraments

John 6:35–59

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read John 6:35–59

The Big Picture

The sacraments are the most direct and powerful way for us to be vitally connected to Jesus Christ and the Church.

People come to know Jesus Christ in a number of ways. The Catholic Church teaches that we can meet Him in the most personal and profound way through the sacraments, where we receive the grace necessary to live out a life fully dedicated to Him.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: First, we want members of the study to develop a desire for the sacraments themselves. It's easy to view sacraments as dead rituals if we don't know the meaning behind them. Second, we want members of the study to see the scriptural foundations for the sacraments (in this case, the Eucharist). This chapter will introduce your study group to both of these ideas.

The Crowd in Context

The crowd in this passage is crucial in understanding our struggle with the sacraments. The surrounding passages tell us more about them: Some of the crowd had presumably already seen Jesus heal the sick (Jn 6:2) and multiply the loaves and fish (Jn 6:10–14). As a result, they tried to make Him their king (Jn 6:15). Despite this, the crowd refuses to believe in Jesus until they see another sign (v. 30). They do not want just any bread, but the bread (manna) from heaven that Moses had provided (v. 31).

Bread of Life (John 6:35–51)

In this passage, Jesus progressively reveals His teaching about the Eucharist. Jesus uses the request for bread to proclaim that He is the bread of life. Belief in Him is not just physical nourishment for the body but also food for the soul, leading to eternal life.

The Jews are taken aback by this response. Before, they wanted more signs; now, they discount Jesus because they cannot comprehend how this man, whose family they know, could have come from heaven (Jn 6:42).

The crowd reveals two tendencies in humanity's relationship with faith. First, we seem to always want more proof. And yet, faith does not work like this: Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Second, humans have a hard time seeing how the material can be made into the supernatural: How can Jesus be from heaven if we know His natural parents? This can be a stumbling block for many. For others, it can be an inspiration.

In the sacraments, God chooses natural materials such as bread and wine and makes them supernatural. Similarly, with these supernatural sacraments, our material bodies will be filled with God's supernatural grace and become more like God Himself.

Application to Jesus

Through the sacraments, Jesus reveals the love of the Father who seeks to show us His love and gives us eternal life.

Eating Flesh? (John 6:52-59)

After the murmuring of the Jews, Jesus affirms His teaching and then makes Himself even clearer. The bread that He offers is better than the miraculous manna in the wilderness. Those who ate that bread did not escape death; this bread leads to eternal life (v. 49). Finally, Jesus specifically says that this bread is, in fact, His very flesh (Jn 6: 51).

The Jews hear this and remark, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" It is clear that they understand Jesus to mean they should literally eat His flesh. Jesus does not correct their understanding; rather, He continues to preach the same message and notes that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is true drink.

Reading this passage in the Greek makes this point even more apparent. In verses 50-58 of chapter 6, John uses the word "eat" eight times. However, John employs two different Greek words that are both translated as "eat" in English:

Phago is used in verses 50–53. It means “to eat” or “to consume” and, in the Greek, is used symbolically.

Trogo is used four times in verses 54–57, when Jesus answers the Pharisees’ objection and clarifies exactly what He means. *Trogo* is more graphic—it means “to chew” or “to gnaw.” *Trogo* cannot be used symbolically in the Greek language; therefore, in this context, we must take it to mean *literally eating* the flesh of Jesus. This graphic word is used to emphasize this very fact.

The Eucharist Lived Out

The Church’s belief in the Eucharist is easy to understand but, at times, hard to accept. Even Our Lord’s followers in the Gospel confess that “this is a hard saying” (Jn 6:60). After listening to this teaching, many of His disciples decide to no longer follow Him (v. 60, 66).

And yet, what a beautiful teaching! Jesus wants to give His whole self—body, blood, soul, and divinity—to us in the Eucharist so that we can be in communion with Him and the whole Church. Throughout this passage, Jesus conveys that He is sent by the Father to give eternal life to those who believe in Him (Jn 6:37–40, 44–47). The sacraments reveal the love of the Father and allow us to receive grace and eternal life. It is easy to get caught up in the ritual and motions of the sacraments and not to see it as a gift of God’s love in a real and tangible way.

Find a tangible way to receive the sacraments more profoundly as a group: for instance, take time to attend daily Mass, go to adoration once a week, learn how to prepare yourself for the Eucharist before mass, or go to confession.

Application to Our Lives

God's grace is always available to us. By opening our hearts to His gifts, we can be filled with grace more abundantly.

NOTES

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

John 6:35–59

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever had the feeling that God was far off and distant from you? What did you do to help the situation?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

This chapter will examine the sacraments. It is important for us to see that the sacraments come from Scripture itself. If we do not understand what the sacraments really are, they become dead rituals with no meaning for our lives today. The sacraments and their supernatural character can be difficult to accept at times. The crowd in the passage today will help us appreciate this struggle.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read John 6:35–59.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. Use the section titled “The Crowd in Context” in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” to give your group a little of the background for the passage.

2. What is strange about the crowd’s request for a sign in light of what Jesus did for them previously?

Answer: Jesus just performed a sign where He multiplied loaves and fish for this very crowd.

3. Why do you think that humans often look for signs?

Answer: Humans want proof for their faith.

4. How are signs or miracles helpful for our faith? How can they be harmful?

Answer: Signs and miracles can be helpful because they remind us of the power of God. At the same time, they can also cause us to constantly seek proof for the faith. Faith is not blind, but there is always a sense of trust or belief beyond what we can see (Heb 11:1).

5. How would you sum up Jesus’ exchange with the Jews in verses 35–42?

Answer: Refer to the first two paragraphs of the “Bread of Life” section in the “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

6. Why exactly do the Jews not believe Jesus' message about His coming down from heaven?

Answer: The Jews don't believe Jesus is the bread of life that came down from heaven because they know His parents.

7. What do you think is the relationship between the doubt of the Jews and the doubts that we can have about the sacraments?

Answer: Refer to the last paragraph of the "Bread of Life" section from "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

8. Why do you think God uses natural objects like bread, wine, and oil for the sacraments? How can these natural means of giving us the supernatural be helpful to us?

Allow the group to discuss.

9. How would you sum up what the Jews think Jesus is saying and how Jesus responds in John 6:52–58?

Answer: The Jews think Jesus is speaking literally. Jesus responds by telling the crowd that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Use "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" to teach your group about the significance of the Greek in this passage.

10. Read John 6:60–69. What is the reaction of Jesus' disciples?

Answer: Jesus' disciples note that the teaching is hard to accept, and many of them cease to follow Him. Peter speaks for the disciples who stay, saying they have faith in Jesus because He has the words of everlasting life.

11. If Jesus' disciples simply misunderstood Him, do you think Jesus would let them leave like this?

Answer: If His disciples simply misunderstood Him, you would expect Jesus to correct them and not let them go.

12. Examine the passage closely. Point out all of the connections between Jesus and the Father.

Answer: See the second paragraph of "The Eucharist Lived Out" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

13. What is the relationship between Jesus' connection to the Father and His teaching on the Eucharist?

Answer: Jesus is revealing the Father through His life. The Eucharist and the sacraments are an image of Jesus and, with it, an image of the Father. The Eucharist is a tangible sign of God's love and the eternal life God provides for us.

14. Read CCC 1324. What does it mean for the Eucharist to be the "source and summit of the Christian life"?

Allow the group to discuss.

15. How can we make the Eucharist the source and summit of our lives?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Refer to "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

NOTES