

Maybe it's just me but I tend to bristle when referred to as a consumer. Maybe it's the connotation of the term like I just gobble things up like the cookie monster. Or maybe it's because I'm being defined by nothing more than my buying and spending. But what I worry most about is that maybe there is some truth to the term when applied to me, and if I dare say, to all of us. When I look at the amount of trash and recycling my little family produces most weeks, I have to pause. When I wonder about how I contribute to global warming, I have to pause. I can go on. I think the main reason I am so upset about having to admit that I am a consumer is that I want to be defined as a Christian instead. And certainly I am. But some days, I ponder a passage as we have today from John, and I pray for strength.

It's quite a reading we have this morning. It's an essential one for our eucharistic theology. Most Christians are at least vaguely familiar with it and some Christians abuse it so we create an us vs. them scenario: we have eternal life, but you do not... I'm glad it comes up in the lectionary so we can really pause to look at it. This passage deserves some time. In part because it discusses the difference between being a consumer and being a Christian; it discusses the significance of choosing a way of life. Kind of like this proverb you may have heard. A little boy asked his grandmother why he sometimes does bad things and wishes he didn't. The grandmother answered that two wolves are fighting inside us all: one evil and one good. Both always want to win. The boy asked: which one will win? And the grandmother answered: the one you feed.

Jesus talks quite a bit about eating and feeding today. He uses a term we have in the Greek: *trogein* to refer to himself and the action of eating the flesh of the son of man but when he mentions the Israelites eating manna and when the religious leaders speak they use a term *phago*. So in a few sentences two words for eating are used a number of times which raises an eyebrow. The simplest way to understand the difference is that *phago* can mean consume and is sometimes even used to describe rust. But *trogein* has more the connotation of digest. We might think of it in this light. What is the difference between consuming and digesting? We consume digital content but we are invited to digest something that is meaningful, yes? The world of commerce refers to people as consumers but intellectual and spiritual pursuits are meant to be digested. Jesus invites us to digest, in order to have more life.

John's gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Life. The word occurs 36 times in the Gospel of John and 16 times in the three Synoptics. But in our passage today, when we read the phrase eternal life in English, we are receiving it from the Greek word for eon. Jesus is saying: Whoever eats this bread will live into the age – into the eon. For John's gospel, deep and abiding life is very important and what we refer to as eternal life is not something that God gives to us in the after-life. Rather, it is something we experience in this life, now, through the son of man: Jesus Christ. Those who trust in Jesus have already passed from death (separation from God through sin) into life with God now – the new age begun in Jesus Christ. So a better term for eternal life here is *limitless life*. All we have to do is eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood...

So what in the world does son of man mean? One place we hear it is in Daniel 7:13-14: *In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given*

*authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.* Daniel is written around the time of Jesus Christ. It seems this conversation on the son of man was percolating. But we get the most uses of the term in Ezekiel from much earlier where we see it used over 90 times and it is when a voice from God speaks with Ezekiel. So, in Ezekiel, he is the son of man.

So what in the world does this title mean? Who knows. But, since our reading today is from John, let's stay there. What is unique in John is that the Son of Man preexists all things. In that way this is a divine being. Simultaneously, John's idea is also that this figure must suffer and die like the rest of us. Nowhere in Hebrew scripture would the Son of man be anything but invincible. So Jesus is taking this concept and giving it new meaning by combining an old idea with a new interpretation. Both divine and human. And then he says we have to eat the guy. Which will take the wisdom of the ages to sort that out so we need some help from Proverbs today.

In the passage, there is an invitation to a feast. Those who accept the invitation must eat and drink, thereby choosing to have a life that embraces wisdom. Notice the instruction to eat is aimed at life now. Proverbs is instruction for the here and now. Three commands are given for living *now*: "lay aside" naivete, "live" (an ethical life), and "walk straight" in understanding. Just like in the gospel, there is an invitation to eat in a way that can be understood spiritually and there is an immediate benefit for life right now. And just as in the gospel, we are presented with a choice: will one choose wisdom or the folly of this world? A theme repeated in Ephesians today.

So at first glance, we have a well-known passage from John where Jesus talks about being the bread of life and we could quickly just say oh yes, there's that again. But grouped together, our readings seem to be inviting us to choose life and in particular, as Christians, to choose life by being fully one with Jesus Christ: so that he may dwell in us and we in him.

So here we are good Christian folk. We know at least on paper that we have decided to follow Jesus. We are baptized. We are here on Sunday, the Lord's day to pray and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion: the body and blood of Christ. What else is there? Perhaps St. Augustine can help us. In a sermon on the Eucharist, he famously says: "Believe what you see, see what you believe and become what you are: the Body of Christ." Which is sometimes shortened to: be what you have received. In other words, he is reminding us that when we allow Jesus to fully dwell within us, when we really digest Jesus, we become an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, which is another way of saying we are living sacraments. As it says in one of our Eucharistic prayers: *Remembering his death and resurrection, we now present to you from your creation this bread and this wine. By your Holy Spirit may they be for us the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Grant that we who share these gifts may be filled with the Holy Spirit and live as Christ's Body in the world.*

So this is not only a way of life we choose but our very existence: we are what we eat. How wonderful to know that we are not consumers, we are sacraments.