

“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time, a certain priest suggested that his congregation consider 3 entirely different, people... from 3 entirely different eras of history: a 16th century explorer, some 21st century senior citizens, and an ancient Chinese emperor, each of which, at 1st glance, did not seem to have much in common. **BUT**... and there's that proverbial **BUT** in life, they did. In fact, they do!

Allow me to explain.

The 16th –century explorer was the Spaniard Ponce de Leon.

Shortly after Columbus discovered America in 14...**92**, rumors spread that the new world contained a fountain of youth. Ponce de Leon outfitted a ship and sailed to America to search for this legendary fountain.

This brings me to the senior citizens.

They are the old people in the movie **Cocoon**. These old people experienced a return to their youth when they bathed in a swimming pool secretly used by alien beings from another planet. Their exciting experience prompted them to accept an invitation from the aliens to go back with them to their planet. The senior citizens were told that, once they reached the alien planet, they would live forever.

Finally, I come to the ancient emperor.

His name is Chin. Chin is the emperor who built the Great Wall of China. Extending over 2,000 miles, the Great Wall is the only structure on earth that astronauts can identify from outer space. According to National Geographic magazine, Emperor Chin had a great fear of dying. One day, his magicians told him about an island-paradise in the Eastern Sea. Its inhabitants had discovered the secret to eternal life. Chin loaded several ships with priceless gifts and dispatched it to the island's inhabitants, hoping to trade the gifts for their secret. Reportedly, the ships found the islands, **BUT**—the islanders would NOT exchange their secret for such paltry gifts!

So, what does all of this boil down to...what is the point I am trying to make?

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Very simply, from the beginning of time, people have always dreamed about never dying. They've dreamed about living forever. They've dreamed about eternal... life!

With each death of a loved one, that ancient dream became more and more of an obsession.

And so-o, when Jesus showed up in Palestine and began to talk about 'eternal life,' people flocked to hear what he had to say.

Jews were especially interested. For, since the time of Abraham & Moses, they were in the dark about what happened to the dead. They believed there was a 'world of the dead.' **BUT**—they had no idea what that world was like. And so, any light Jesus shed on the mystery was welcome.

One of the most remarkable things Jesus ever said about eternal life is what he says in today's Gospel, which I just read to you from St. John. Listen, again, to his remarkable words:

“I AM ... bread of life... that comes down from heaven....

If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.

The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I give so the world will live.”

Jesus reveals that life in this world isn't the end of things...there's another life to come. And, THAT life will never end. It's an endless, everlasting life.

Is it any wonder...that many Jews shook their heads at Jesus, especially when he said:

"I AM ...the bread that came down from heaven"?

Is it any wonder...that they grumbled among themselves, saying,

**"Is this not Jesus, son of Joseph? Do we not know his father & mother?
How can he claim to have come down from heaven?"**

Only when Jesus rose from the dead did many of these Jews re-consider his words & take them seriously.

So-o--that brings me to **this** church, on **this** day, at **this** particular time.

We have gathered together this week to hear the word of Jesus about eternal life.

We have gathered together this week to be nourished by the Body of Jesus, the bread of eternal life.

You see, what Ponce de Leon searched for in America, what the senior citizens looked for in **Cocon**, what the emperor himself sought in the Paradise islands of the Eastern Sea... is with us, in this church today!

Jesus Christ, Son of God, the fountain & wellspring of eternal life, is present with us right now!

He is with us in his spirit. He said to his followers:

"Where two or three come together in my name, I AM there with them" ^{Mt.18:20}.

Jesus is with us in his word. What he said 2,000 years ago to the people... is what he said to us a few minutes ago in today's Gospel.

Jesus is with us in his representative, the priest... especially at the Consecration of the Mass!

Speaking to his representatives, Jesus said: **"Whoever listens to you, listens to me."** ^{Lk.10:16}

And, finally, Jesus is with us in the sacrament of eternal life. It was concerning this sacrament that he said in today's Gospel:

"I am the bread of life. If anyone eats this bread, he 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 the things you see, but they could not, and hear what you hear, But... they could not." ^{Lk.10:23-24}

All we can do in the face of such great 'mystery' is pray...so I close with this prayer:

"God our Father, you have given us so much. Forgive us if we ask for one more thing:

Give us the faith to recognize the spirit of your Son...

in the hearts of our brothers & sisters in this church, right now.

Give us the faith to recognize the voice of your Son...

in the word we have just read & heard explained to us.

But, above all, give us the faith to recognize the Body of your Son...

in the bread we now prepare to break & share.

We make this prayer, as all prayer, through Christ, Our Lord...through whom, with whom, and in whom...we will, one day, live with you and the Holy Spirit, one God... forever & EVER."

Amen!