



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Friday of the Third Week of Easter

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"Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." I would like to reflect for a few moments on this verse from the Gospel of John. When Jesus claimed that the Father sent him, his hearers would have assumed he had been sent from one place on earth to another for a particular mission. What he really meant is that he had been sent, as he says in another place, "into the world," implying that he had been outside the world, above it, with his Father for all eternity. The Jews recognized that he was claiming an intimate familiarity with God.

What did this familiarity consist in? Jesus adds, "and I have life because of the Father." He derives all his life from the Father, is generated by the Father, is the Father's Son. As we say in the Creed he is "begotten not made, one in being with the Father, God from God." The Father gives everything he is to the Son, the Son is his complete replica, is not less than the Father. There has never been a time when the Father was not generating the Son, when he was without the Son. As long as there was a Father there was his only-begotten Son.

That is the life Jesus brings into the world when he takes on humanity. His human life is a reflection of the divine, the translation of the divine into human terms, God made visible so that we can know God. When Jesus says, "I have life because of the Father," he is saying in effect, I show you the life of God.

Then comes the extraordinary parallel that Jesus wishes to make: in the same way that he draws life from the Father, "so also he who feeds on me will have life because of me." He wishes us to draw life from him as he draws life from the Father. For this reason he left his church with the power to transform ordinary bread into his body so that the life he receives from his Father, the divine life, can be passed on to us. When we consume the Eucharist, we live with a divine life, God's own life; the Son of God lives his life in us.

What does this mean for us? It means that we are sons of God, have the very same relationship with the Father as Jesus has. We have the absolute certainty of being bonded with the Father in love, an utter trust that nothing can harm us. And what are the consequences of this attitude? First we can accept ourselves, appreciate our selves, know that we are good. We can let go of self-hatred, of putting ourselves down. We can let go of worries, of fear, of caring too much about what people think, of pretending to be somebody we're not. We can let go of piling up material securities that would supposedly give us worth or meaning, for we have true life, lasting life. We can give up having to retaliate when we're hurt or mistreated. We can forgive. We can wash one another's feet, as Jesus



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washed the apostles' feet the night before he died, saying, "I have given you an example so that as I have done to you, you also might do." It is difficult to wash another's feet, to put your own interests on hold to serve another's needs. But at the very same supper at which he gave us that command, he gave us the Eucharist which gives us his life so that we can fulfill the command. Christianity has very high demands, but its core message is not laws but a gift of divine life that empowers us to fulfill God's commands and so have life. This is especially important with respect to the Church's demanding teaching on sexual morality.

I would like to leave you with a saying of St. Leo the Great: "Christian, remember your dignity." Remember your divine status. For you seniors who are about to leave, the one thing we monks hope you'll carry with you is that awareness of your dignity as a son of God, a dignity nourished through the Eucharist. Be faithful to the Eucharist. Don't accept cheap formulas for a happiness that never lasts, that doesn't satisfy your deepest need for lasting life. When you fail, as we all do, come back to the sacraments. We all have to keep starting again, keep trying to accept the Lord's gift in the infinite reaches of our being. Stay rooted in God.

Just as the Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." Don't settle for anything less.