

In his "Selkirk Grace," Scottish poet, Robert Burns, writes,

Some hae meat and canna eat;  
And some wad eat that want it;  
But we hae meat, and we can eat;  
Sae let the Lord be thankit. (1)

Robbie Burns realised that it is a blessing beyond words when appetite and food meet and realise that they can each satisfy the other. However, he also realised that there are always those who have an appetite and yet no meat and they deserve our pity: "Some wad eat that want it." The Gospel of John chapter 6 might be called the breadbasket of John's gospel. It starts out with Jesus asking Philip where they might find sufficient bread for the gathered multitude (v. 5). This leads to the miracle of the feeding of 5,000 from a boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two fish (vv. 9-13). Jesus reminds the crowd that God provided bread for their forefathers in the desert (vv. 31-32) before speaking about another kind of bread as he repeatedly identifies himself as the bread of life: "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (v. 33). "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (v. 41). "Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die" (v. 50). The Jewish leaders among the multitude did not understand and were grumbling among themselves. "The light shined in their darkness but they did not understand it" (see John 1:5). Then, as if to add insult to their injury, Jesus goes even further with the idea of bread:

*I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. - John 6:53-57*

Who is the living bread? From the outset of his Gospel, as I mentioned two weeks ago St John makes clear who he is:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:1-4, 14*

The maker of all things has come among us as "the bread come down from heaven." Like a striking catchphrase, Jesus keeps making his point but the religious leaders of his time just do not get the truth that he is, in fact, pre-existent bread now made incarnate among us.

*When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." - John 6:25-27*

In short, Jesus is telling them, and us, not to follow him shortsightedly for what he might do for us but for who he is. Even the ordinary people have a hard time understanding him at this point. Ingrained in them is the notion of their leaders that salvation is not of God but of their own works. In short, they want to work to earn the bread but he tells them that this bread is already paid for because the baker has become the bread.

Not only is he the living bread and already paid for, he is the ready bread, willing to accomplish his work: "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). How eager is Jesus to do the Father's will? We find that answer not here but in Gethsemane's garden, where in agony he concedes to the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). From the beginning to the end of his life on earth, Jesus set the example for every Christian that we are to be ready to follow God through thick and thin. What was and is the will of God? It is that as the wheat and barley is ground up and beaten into flour for bread, so Jesus, the bread of God, should be broken and ground up to pay for the sins of the world on the cross. Why should this be? Jesus gives us the answer:

*"This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* - John 6:39-40

How do we acquire this living bread? The answer is in today's scripture reading: "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." We have seen that it is not by works but simply by eating it. It is already paid for on the cross. Not only did the baker become the bread, he paid for it. Therefore, all we must do is take it by faith. We say, "Lord Jesus, I take you to myself that I may live forever with you."

Three elements of personality are involved in making a faith decision to receive Jesus. They are intellect, emotions, and will. The same three elements are found in falling in love. A couple meets. They are attracted to one another. They think, "There is someone I might like to marry one day." At this point, if we were purely emotional beings, wedding bells would chime. We are not just emotional, however, and the intellect raises some questions: "Are we really well-matched?" "Do we want to spend the rest of our lives together?" "Can we afford this?" "Is it really a good idea?" The couple begins to spend some time getting to know each other and if it is a good thing, the intellect falls into line with the emotions. "Let's plan the big day," the intellect and the emotions say. "Wait," says the will, "I'm not settled on this idea yet." The will asks, "Am I really ready to give up the freedoms and benefits I have as a single person? "Am I ready to take on the additional responsibility that marriage brings?" "Am I willing to share my life with another person?" The wedding bells do not ring until the will answers these and other questions to its satisfaction. So it is in becoming a disciple. Intellectually, I come to conclude that it makes sense. Emotionally, I make a commitment. Then, I must will to make the mental and lifestyle changes being a disciple demands.

The baker, Jesus, became the bread and the baker bought the bread, but are we ready to eat it? We receive this living bread by uniting ourselves with Jesus who makes us this promise.

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.* - John 6:54, 56

As the French physician, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, wrote in 1826, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Whatever we are physically is the result of the food we have eaten. If we did not eat, we would die. What we become spiritually we will be because of taking Jesus into our lives. What benefits do we receive from taking the living bread?

*Jesus says, “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever ...Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”(John 6:51, 54).*

Wouldn't you like to know that you have a life that clocks and calendars cannot measure? Wouldn't you like to know that death cannot win against you? This is the first benefit of eternal life as offered by Jesus Christ. Death is the end, neither of this life nor the beginning of a new life, but merely a milestone in eternal life. Everlasting life is an uninterrupted fellowship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ. All the riches and resources of everlasting life are present now. When we eat the living bread we shall never again be out of the presence of God. The second benefit Jesus promises is this: “I will raise him up at the last day.” The Greek verb could be translated to say, “I will stand tall with him at the last day.” One day, the graves will open and one day those whom we have loved and lost for a while will stand. We who are Christ's shall stand with them because we consumed this living bread called Jesus.

Finally, we experience the benefit that comes from having a living friend in heaven now, for scripture says that Jesus “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). He is our living intercessor who represents us, and our needs, in the Father's throne room.

Thanks be to God, the baker is our bread and the baker bought our bread. Come and eat and “let the Lord be thankit!” Amen.

Fr Robert Newton

1. Robert Burns, “Selkirk Grace,” *The Poems of Robbie Burns* (Edinburgh: John MacDougall, 1921).