



# The Bread of Life: Part 1

John 6:1-21

Catholic writer and apologist G.K. Chesterton wrote that “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.”

Perhaps one of the most difficult of Jesus' teachings to fully comprehend is Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist; so much so that when He first taught it various individuals who were following Him left Him.

Even today, we know that this teaching can be difficult to accept. In the 2019 Pew Research Center study, only 31% of Catholics were found to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Or, put another way, at least 69% of Catholics in 2019 did not believe that Jesus is truly, substantially present in the Eucharist.

How can we share this with other people so that, to use Chesterton's words, they actually “try” it, rather than leave it untried because it seems too difficult to grasp?

First, it is important to recognize that the Eucharist is not a what but a who: Jesus Christ. He freely gave His flesh and blood out of love for us; making His whole self, truly and substantially present under the appearance of bread and wine, so that we may have Eternal Life.

Second, it's important to look at what it means to say that Jesus freely gave His flesh and blood out of love for us by examining what Jesus taught about the Eucharist in John Chapter 6, which contains Jesus' Bread of Life discourse.

In this first insert, we'll look at the context for Jesus' discourse. Then, in the subsequent insert, we'll examine the discourse and what Jesus explains the Bread of Life to be.

In the first portion of John Chapter 6, specifically verses 1-21, Jesus performs two miracles before giving his teaching on the Bread of Life.

The first miracle is the feeding of the 5,000 - which is found in all four Gospels. The second miracle is Jesus walking on water, also known as the Theophany at Sea.

For the Feeding of the 5,000, here's the scene: Jesus goes up on a mountain around the time of the Jewish Passover. There's an issue: thousands of people - over 5,000 men, not counting women and children - have followed Him. They're hungry and there's no food.

When asked by Jesus, the Apostle Philip shares that buying food for everyone would have cost 200 day's wages. Instead, Andrew finds a boy with two barley loaves and five fish. So, Jesus has everyone sit on the grass, takes the loaves and fishes, gives thanks, blesses them, and distributes them. The miracle of the multiplication occurs and suddenly little food turns into food for thousands, with 12 baskets left over.

In doing this, Jesus communicates important truths ahead of the Bread of Life discourse.

First - Jesus is shown to be the new Moses. Moses is the greatest prophet. He is the lawgiver. Where did Moses receive the Law from God? On a mountain. What did Moses do when the Hebrews were hungry in the desert without food? He asked God, who provided manna.

Here, Jesus is on a mountain. Jesus provides food when there is none. He's even performing this miracle near the time of Passover. Jesus is thus revealed to be the fulfillment of what Moses proclaimed.

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This miracle shows that Jesus - even more so than Moses - has authority as the new lawgiver; as God. As a result, what He will proclaim in the Bread of Life discourse has great weight.

Second - Jesus is shown to be a provider. He makes the ordinary, extraordinary. The Feeding of the 5,000 is a very Eucharistic passage. Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, blesses, breaks it, and then gives it out. Sound familiar? While the bread Jesus gives in this first miracle is simply bread, it prefigures what He does at the Last Supper, where He gives the Eucharist and the perennial command: do this in memory of me. It's no coincidence that Jesus precedes his teaching on the Eucharist in John's Gospel with such a miracle.

Let's now turn to the second miracle: the Theophany at Sea.

After the Feeding of the 5,000 - Jesus leaves the scene while His disciples head out in a boat onto the sea. John tells us that they are in deep water, perhaps 3-4 miles out. The water is tumultuous - stirred up by a strong wind.

It's here - in the midst of chaos - that Jesus comes out to them on the water. When the Apostles ask who it is, Jesus responds "It is I", or - the literal translation - "I AM". Jesus reveals who He is - "I AM". It is the same name that God gave when Moses asked God for His name at the burning bush. Jesus reveals Himself to be God to His Apostles in the midst of their chaos.

Why is this important right before explaining the Bread of Life?

Jesus is about to give one of His most pivotal teachings. In these miracles, Jesus reveals Himself to be God - the ultimate authority to give such a teaching. Jesus is telling us: the teaching you are about to hear is important and will be given by God Himself, so pay attention! God deserves to be taken seriously.

Feeding 5,000 people and walking on water to show He is God and prefigure the Eucharist is a lot of effort to go through if all Jesus was going to explain later on was simply a symbol or a metaphor. As a result, we should take Jesus at His word when he explains the Bread of Life.

Thus, when discussing belief in the Eucharist, begin the conversation by focusing on Jesus Himself. Through these two miracles we can communicate 5 main points:

1. Jesus is Divine, and as such:
2. He has the authority to teach truth, including on the Eucharist
3. He is a provider, who can make the ordinary extraordinary (a pretty important concept to remember when it comes to the Eucharist)
4. What He will provide is not only true, but fulfills everything that came before Him
5. It wouldn't make sense for Jesus to go to the lengths He did prior to the Bread of Life discourse if all He was going to teach was a symbol or metaphor

By all means, what Jesus is about to explain is not a mere symbol nor metaphor. If you thought manna in the desert, multiplying loaves and fishes, and walking on water is impressive, Jesus is sharing that this is all an introduction to what He really wants to give us: His flesh and blood for the life of the world.