

**Reflection on the Gospel-The Body and Blood of Christ Year A
(John 6:51-58)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Bread is staple food for much of Earth's human population. Bread is also a metaphor for the food that sustains a person, a family, a people. Being able to 'put bread on the table' is the concern of every parent. Bread means life. Jesus' claim to be 'the living bread' is a unique expression paralleled by his earlier claim to be 'living water'. It teases the reader with the possibility of multiple meanings. It refers at one level to food that gives life; at another, it is the sustaining gift of God's life.

Today's gospel passage belongs within a section of John's gospel generally called the Bread of Life Discourse. Some scholars suggest that the discourse as a whole is cast in the form of a synagogue homily. In this view, it is a rabbinic type exposition of Exodus 16:4 and Psalm 78:4-5 on the manna/bread that God rains from heaven or of Isa 55:1 with its invitation for the thirsty to come to the waters and the penniless to 'buy wine and milk without money and without price'. In the Wisdom literature, bread is identified with God's word and that is the focus in the earlier part of the discourse. In 6:51-58, the allusions to Eucharist as both meal and sacrifice are more obvious. Jesus is the manna or bread from heaven. Life comes from eating his flesh/body. It also comes from drinking his blood. For the ancient Israelites, the life was in the blood. Blood poured out of any creature is life poured out. To drink the wine/blood is to participate in the life of Christ poured out.

While all analogies fall short, a simple example from my own context might help us to grasp something of the mystery that we call Eucharist. My home town, Ballarat, is the site of the Eureka rebellion. The Eureka flag has recently been restored and has been transferred from its home in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery to a place of honour in the Museum of Australian Democracy. At one level, this flag is fabric and thread. At another, it transcends the materials from which it is crafted. These materials were transformed, possibly by women from my own parish, into a symbol of freedom for the Eureka rebels. In the process, they changed their purpose and meaning; so too with the bread and wine of our Eucharistic celebrations. While the bread and wine retain their materiality, they have become, in a very real though mysterious sense, the body and blood of Christ. This Sunday we take time to reflect on the mystery we celebrate from week to week as we share the true bread and true drink that offers the promise of life beyond our imagining.