

**Hidden Manna**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Jn 6:60-69; Rv 2:17)**

In the book of Revelation, St. John writes to the churches about the mysteries of faith in ways that are symbolic and “cryptic.” It is a common style for him, even in his Gospel. Many texts must be deciphered to reveal their meaning. One such verse is Revelation 2:17 – *“To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.”*

St. John writes about the Church’s “**Hidden Manna**,” which he describes as a **white stone** that acquires a **new name**, known only to the one **able** to receive it. This is the bread of the Eucharist, which acquires a new identity when it is changed from ordinary bread into the Body of Christ. Only the baptized, the believer, is able to receive it; because only those initiated into the faith know who Jesus really is, and how his words in John 6 proclaim his Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. To anyone else, the bread of the consecrated Eucharist looks and seems no different than the unconsecrated bread, because in outward appearance no change is observable. The believer, however, who knows Jesus and the words he spoke in John 6, recognizes the true identity and new reality of the Hidden Manna.

St. John refers to the Church’s hidden manna as a “white stone,” indicating its purity (white), and also relating it to the white manna which the Israelites picked off the desert floor during the Exodus. But he also calls it a “stone” because when Jesus undertook his 40-day desert journey the devil tempted him to turn the stones of the desert floor into bread, to satisfy his hunger (Mt 4:3). Unlike the false bread of the devil which does not nourish the soul but brings death instead, and which is acquired by “cheating,” Christ gives the True Bread, which requires the hard work of faith, but which nourishes the soul and body to eternal life. Man does not live on (earthly) bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4) through the Holy Spirit, especially the words spoken by Jesus in John 6, the words which tell about the Eucharist.

These are the solemn and most holy words that we heard in the Gospel last Sunday (Jn 6:51-58), words which Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Capernaum the day following his great miracle (Jn 6:59), words which are “Spirit and Life” (Jn 6:63), and of which St. Peter confesses in today’s Gospel reading: “Master, you have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

The Eucharist is at the heart of the Church. It is the most intimate and profound “secret” of the Church, able to be known only by believers. Jesus tested the crowd and the apostles in the Bread of Life discourse. He spoke openly and exactly, in a direct and fully literal way about what the Eucharist would be – “*The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... My flesh is [will be] true food, and my blood is [will be] true drink*” (Jn 6:51,55) – and at the Last Supper he reiterated these words in a fully literal way when he established the Eucharist for the Church, connecting it with the sacrifice of his death and resurrection: “*Take and eat, this [bread] is my body which is given for you [in sacrifice]; take and drink, this chalice [of wine] is my blood which is poured out for you and many, for the forgiveness of sin*” (Mt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25 ).

But the people were not able to understand or accept, and most stopped being his followers (Jn 6:60,66). Only those who knew who Jesus was, where he was from, (“*we have come to believe and are convinced, you are the Holy One of God*” Jn 6:69), were able to accept his words. Only those who are able to know new identity of this “stone” may receive it. The official teaching of the Church affirms the mystery of the Eucharist which must be accepted, by two important doctrines; that of the “Real Presence,” and that of “Transubstantiation.”<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of the **Real Presence** asserts that in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is literally and wholly present—body and blood, soul and divinity—under the appearances of bread and wine (*Catechism*, 1374).

The doctrine of **Transubstantiation** asserts that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood (*Catechism*, 1375-76).

It is not possible to know about the Eucharist through purely human thinking, or relying upon the senses: “the flesh is of no avail” (Jn 6:63). Instead, it requires the acceptance of revelation through the Holy Spirit – “these words are Spirit and life” (Jn 6:63) as well as a special grace from the Father to recognize the Son (Jn 6:65). But on the human level Christ does provide signs through which we can be disposed to that divine gift of faith and begin to believe, signs such as the great miracle of multiplication (Jn 6:1-13; cf. 6:26), and for the apostles the walking on water (Jn 6:16-21).

It is also not possible to understand fully the reasons for the Eucharist without knowing about Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension (Jn 6:61-62). Above all, it was to assure our eternal life and resurrection beyond death that Jesus came

---

<sup>1</sup> Additional important teachings, such as the Eucharist as memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, are for another homily.

down from heaven and took up our flesh in the Incarnation. In his own flesh he conquered death; by his glorified and risen flesh he now gives our mortal flesh the antidote to death through the Eucharist: *“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (Jn 6:54).

It was on Easter Sunday, when the risen Lord Jesus celebrated the first official Mass of the Church at Emmaus, that *“They recognized him in the Breaking of Bread”* (Lk 24:35). Since that first Mass, Catholics recognize the Lord in every Mass, sacrificed and risen, really and truly present “in the flesh” which is now glorified at the right hand of the Father.

When St. Peter confesses his belief in the Eucharist, even before Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, his profession centers not on the understanding of this mystery, but rather on the certain knowledge of *who* Jesus is and that his words cannot deceive: *“Master, you have the words of eternal life, and we have come to know, and are convinced, that you are the Holy One of God”* (Jn 6:69).

Knowledge of the Real Presence, through baptism and the gift of Catholic faith, is a necessary precondition for admission to Holy Communion. In addition, we must be free of sin, living in a state of grace, according to the law of Christ and the Gospel.

Only those who recognize the Lord in the Breaking of Bread and are properly disposed may approach the Eucharist. St. Paul stressed this when he taught, *“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself”* (1 Cor 11:27-29).

As we come to the end of this great chapter of St. John, in which Jesus reveals a central truth for the life of the Church, let us renew our faith in him, and in the words which he continues to speak every time we celebrate Mass: “Take and eat, this is my body; take and drink, this is my blood.” Let us be victorious in the faith, and treasure our Hidden Manna.