

THE SACRAMENTS IN SCRIPTURE: EUCHARIST AND CONFIRMATION

“All the invisible realities of our redemption become visible in the sacraments.”

–Pope Leo the Great

There are three major themes in John 6:

- (1) The manna that comes from the multiplied loaves and the manna that Jesus refers to from the Exodus both point to spiritual food.
- (2) The miracle and the discourse both point to the Messianic banquet.
- (3) The manna of which Jesus speaks alludes to the wisdom feast: the very Wisdom of God as food for the soul.

It is very important thing for us to keep this in mind: **look at John 6 as a unified whole**. John throws a lot of things into this narrative, and all of them are intentional. Also recall that the Bread of Life discourse takes the place of the institution narrative (though not the Last Supper) in John’s Gospel.

1. John 6:1-21.

- In v.4, immediately after setting the geographical stage for us, John gives us a significant detail: all of this happened ***near the time of the Passover***. Again, none of the details John includes are coincidences.
- The miraculous feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle that appears in all four Gospels.
- The miraculous feeding (manna) and the crossing of the Sea of Galilee (Red Sea) point back to Exodus.

2. John 6:22-50.

- You could argue that none of the references to “manna,” “bread of life,” and “eating” before v.51 are explicitly Eucharistic, but you run into a few problems...
- In v.23, John uses the Greek word, *eucharistesantos*, “thanksgiving,” a word that by the time John was writing his Gospel already had very strong Eucharistic overtones.
- In v.27, the verse takes up a theme that also appears in Deuteronomy 8:2-3 and Wisdom 16:26... but it also assumes that you accept the book of Wisdom as part of the OT canon. In other words, you can accept a spiritual interpretation of some (not all) of the references to eating and bread *if* you also accept the Deuterocanon (what Protestants call the Apocrypha), but it’s very difficult if you don’t accept both.
- Another Exodus reference in v.41: the Jews “murmur” against Jesus like the Israelites did with Moses.

3. John 6:51-53.

- Recall just how horrifying this would have been to the Jews, since eating or drinking anything with blood in it was expressly forbidden (to say nothing of cannibalism).
- Notice that a major dispute breaks out over Christ’s words – why not simply explain them? If they were merely symbolic or metaphorical, this dispute could have been quickly dissipated or avoided altogether.
- In fact, Jesus ups the ante: he uses the Greek word *trogein*, “to chew/munch/gnaw,” a much more graphic verb more commonly associated with the way that animals eat.
- A word about v.63: this **CANNOT** mean that the body and the flesh are useless, because otherwise it would negate the Incarnation of Christ. The Eucharist gives life because Jesus is both human and divine, and because he is united with the Holy Spirit his words are indeed spirit and truth.

4. Numbers 9:15-17. *On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant; and from evening until morning it was over the tabernacle, having the appearance of fire. It was also so: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the Israelites would camp.*

- The tabernacle was the tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant.
- Fire and cloud – symbols of the Holy Spirit – hovering over the tabernacle and guiding Israel.

5. Matthew 3:11-17. *“I baptize you with water, for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*

- Was Jesus confirmed? Not the way we think of it, but he establishes it as a sacrament and as he does in everything else, he shows us the way to follow the Father. Also note its association with baptism.
- The same Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism descends on us at our confirmation.

5. Acts 2:1-4. *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

- Again: the Holy Spirit and fire.

6. Acts 10: 44-48. *While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.*

- Did baptism and confirmation take place “out of order” here? Pay attention to the circumstances (read the whole chapter, incidentally). These are the very first Gentile Christians, so the Holy Spirit broke the mold, as it were, to get the attention of Peter and the other disciples.