

"HOW CAN THIS MAN GIVE US HIS FLESH TO EAT?"

When Jesus said he was the true bread that comes from God as food he may have been hinting at denying that any bread allegedly turned into him was really him....the true bread is a man and is not bread in any sense

JOHN 6:52, THE CRUCIAL VERSE

The Catholics argue that John 6 shows that Jesus taught the Catholic doctrine that bread and wine become his body and blood at Mass in order to be our spiritual food and drink. And that despite the fact that Jesus never mentions literal bread in the text. He does not mention how his blood is to be drunk. He does not mention wine and Catholic doctrine is that wine is absolutely essential if you want to drink the blood of Christ.

Jesus says he is the bread of life and the bread he will give is his flesh for the life of the world. Not everybody thinks he meant this literally.

When Jesus said that the bread he will give us to eat is his flesh the Jews asked in John 6:52, "How is He able to give us His flesh to eat?"

This bit is central for Catholics. They say Jesus did not tell them they were wrong to say that. Additionally, they say that Jesus answered that they must eat his body and drink his blood so he meant it literally.

But that would mean that if the Jews thought, as Augustine said, that Jesus meant he would cut limbs etc off to feed them, that they were right!

Jesus tells the Jews he came down from the Father. The Jews fail to understand that the Father is God. They just mumble about how he can say he descended from heaven when he is the son of Joseph and they know his mother and father? He tells them nothing. He does not even say, "I am not talking about Joseph". Jesus continuing after their question does not mean he was answering it.

The Jews asking how Jesus can give his flesh to eat could have been natural enough for when a man talks in symbols you might ask him questions using the same metaphors. It is like somebody saying they will bite your head off and you asking "Why would you bite my head off?" It would not mean you take them literally.

Jesus said that he is the bread of life and whoever eats it will never hunger and the bread he will give is his flesh for the life of the world. The Jew's question was in response to that. For the question to have been meant seriously and literally it would be necessary to prove that Jesus was clearly speaking literally in the previous verse. But nobody goes that far. All agree that the bread of life material is symbolic. Even Catholics do not hold that the bread I will give is my flesh bit is literal. They deny that Jesus' flesh is bread for at the Eucharist the bread does not exist any more. Whether you believe in the Mass or not, Jesus' flesh can be understood as bread in the sense that it feeds our spiritual life and our relationship with God.

Life is the bread that brings you to everlasting life. It is called the bread of life in the sense that life is the bread. This life is a supernatural life that enjoys a supernatural relationship with God and lasts forever.

It is wrong to imagine Jesus moving from the subject of symbolic bread to bread that has been transubstantiated into flesh. To do that would make it impossible to tell what was symbolic and what wasn't especially in such a strange subject matter. This would be sufficient evidence and a clear hint that the Jews knew that Jesus was not talking literally. That way, there would have been no need for him to say he was speaking figuratively. The Catholic argument that the Jews took him literally and he accepted that literalism when he did not refute it but went on to say more about eating his body and drinking his blood is incorrect. Nobody mixes literalism and symbolism in such a way so Jesus meant that the bread and flesh both are symbols. He is saying that he is bread to the soul.

If Jesus was unintelligible then the passage cannot support transubstantiation for it is confused and silly.

The Jews would have taken Jesus to mean cannibalism if they took him literally. The way Jesus was talking some of them if not all would have had to take him that way.

If so, then Jesus was promising cannibalism. Even Catholicism cannot accept that.

Catholicism would say, "But then they would not have been arguing and wondering about how he could give his flesh to eat for cannibalism is not a mystery. You just die and are cooked and eaten."

The answer is that Jesus knew they did not mean it literally when they asked how he could give his flesh to eat. He did not tell them that he meant transubstantiation and not cannibalism. He never said, "I will turn bread into my body and you will eat it." He never told them what he meant. How can this man give us his flesh to eat could mean in what way will he do it?

When Jesus was after multiplying bread miraculously they would not have been asking how he could give his flesh like bread for miracles can't be understood. They thought he meant that he would die to give himself as spiritual food by means of earning grace to save us which was considered impossible for a Messiah. Also, Catholics may claim that Jesus answered them that he meant it literally but this is untrue for he did not go into the hows at all. He did not even say as much as that his flesh would take the form of bread and his blood wine. He just talked about giving his flesh for them to eat.

Had the Jews been taking Jesus literally they would not have been wondering how he could give his flesh to eat after he multiplied bread. They would have thought that Jesus would miraculously multiply his flesh presumably in a cooked and edible form. They must have taken the spiritual interpretation meaning, "How can this man feed us with himself, how can his flesh be the source of grace for us and grace is the food that we need to be close to God, when he is not even the Messiah?"

The Jews could have been arguing about how he could give his body in mockery of Jesus when they mumbled among themselves that they couldn't see how this man could give them his flesh to eat. It could have been a mock question intended to express scorn. The fact that they had no reason to think he would literally give his flesh as the verse, "I am the bread of life and the bread I will give is my flesh" shows should hint at that. Jesus had no need to answer mockery and people making fun of him and there is no reason to believe he even heard them or was speaking to the mockers, if that is what they were, when he went on to say "you must eat my body" for maybe most people in the group didn't join in the mockery. It is possible that what he said after they asked how he could give his flesh was not a reply but a continuation of the discussion.

The Catholic argument for transubstantiation rests on Jesus not answering the Jews when they murmured how he could give his body as food but continuing to say they would eat his body. But John never said if Jesus heard them or not. The fact that they mumbled among themselves and not to him suggests that he never noticed. They wouldn't all have been grumbling so Jesus could have been addressing the ones who did not when he told them to eat him. Jesus told them minutes before to stop their murmuring when they said he was only the son of Joseph and couldn't have come down from Heaven. Thus he had told them he was not going to respect their mutterings and so the Catholic argument is devoid of substance. He could have said, "I mean God has called me to save you when I say I came down from Heaven." He didn't. He didn't correct them there for they had a bad attitude so why would he correct them when they said he was literally going to give them his flesh as food.

If the Jews took Jesus literally, he disapproved then because the chapter gives them no reason to do that it could be that this is a hint that when Jesus went on to say the rest that he did so in a tone of voice that carried his disgust at their infantile literalism. Jesus may have done this earlier in the sermon when he did not refute the Jews who argued that he was not the bread from heaven when they knew his father. They were claiming that he was saying that he never had a human birth. He considered their argument to be sarcasm and had no need to reply to it. Having said that, the apostles complained that Jesus could be so enigmatic that he could be confusing (John 16:29). Jesus himself said that he was talking to them in veils all the time (John 16:25). At that time, subsequent to his talk about the bread of life and eating his body and blood they exclaimed, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly to us and not in parables".

Jesus said that just as the manna came from Heaven so he came from Heaven. The Jews laughed at that for they said they knew his father. They did not take his talk about coming from Heaven to mean that he just came down from Heaven. They took him to mean he was claiming that Heaven sent him to earth to be conceived and born. The saying is probably best understood as a metaphor. Jesus taken literally is saying he dropped down ready made from Heaven. But the Jews were there. They knew he didn't mean it literally. What he said was probably symbolism indicating that the whole passage is symbolic. It is a preparation for the symbolism about Jesus' flesh and blood being eaten and drunk.

The Jews knew that Jesus could not do silly miracles and had been taught that his grace was the food for the soul. Therefore, they could not have meant to give the impression that they took Jesus literally. They could have been just sarcastic.

If the Jews took Jesus to mean transubstantiation then this would have been asking them to drink blood and to honour the bread and drink turned into Jesus. He would have been put out of the synagogue for saying such things inside it. He wasn't. He was even allowed into the Temple! He would have been accused of contradicting the law that bans blood drinking and

condoning idolatry. Idolatry was a capital offence so he would have been immediately arrested and stoned to death for teaching it. None of these things happened so the Jews knew that Jesus did not teach what Catholics say he taught about the Eucharist. The Jews knew that Jesus was not giving them his body to eat and his blood to drink as in the Eucharist.

Jesus said in the other gospels that the only thing that makes you clean before God or unclean is what you give birth to in your heart. If Jesus meant real food and drink the Jews would have said, "Thought you said that what you eat cannot affect your heart but is physical and goes out the other end and has no power to make you unclean or therefore clean either"? The teaching that food had no power to sully you before God and therefore no power to clean you was a core one in the Christian Church in the earliest days.

The Holy Spirit is said to be water you can drink in John 7:37-39 and John 3:5 and nobody takes those literally. Jesus didn't have to tell the Jews they were wrong to take him literally when he said he would give his flesh to eat for they must have known the kind of symbolism he engaged in. You don't answer real or feigned ignorance like that. You don't dignify it.

CLUES JOHN GIVES TO FORESTALL A LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Catholics put their own interpretation on John 6. It is not the text that they base transubstantiation on but their interpretation. It all hangs on their notion that the Jews must have been right to interpret Jesus literally when he promised to give his flesh as food when he said nothing to correct them.

In John 1:14, John talks about the Word - that is the ultimate revelation of God in which he is fully present became flesh. So the flesh of Jesus is identified with the word or self-disclosure of God and so is the full of truth. To eat the flesh of Jesus could be to absorb the word of God. The line before all that says that being born of blood, born of the will of man, born of the will of the flesh (sex) does not make you a child of God and only God does that. This seems to deny that sacraments have any effect.

And they know that the Jews in the same gospel took Jesus to be saying he would destroy the Temple in chapter 2 and never corrected them.

Suppose Jesus really was taken literally by the Jews and thought to be promising to turn into food and drink. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that he would give her water that would be everlasting and she asked if he meant he could take away the need to ever go to the well again. He just kept saying about this water as if he meant it literally. You see the same device in John 6. Jesus says something and ignores those who take him literally and talks as if he didn't hear them in such a way that he might be taken literally. That is why Catholics saying that when Jesus didn't correct the Jews for taking him literally the Jews were right to do so is incorrect. Nothing in the New Testament says the bread and wine of the communion become the body and blood of Jesus.

The Church says he did correct the woman for he said he meant living water as in spiritual water that wells up to eternal life. But what if he turned the water in her pail to such water? Their answer is no good. And her leaving the well to tell her friends she met Jesus is supposed to prove that she understood that Jesus did not mean she would get an everlasting water supply and never need to use the well again. And the Church says that it proves it. How desperate!

And so they know that the Samaritan woman wasn't corrected when she thought that Jesus was going to give her magic water in 4.

They know that the Jews weren't corrected when they thought he said his followers would never experience physical death in John 8:51.

Jesus in John 3 tells Nicodemus that one must be born again to be saved with God forever. Nicodemus thinks he means reincarnation and asks if a man can enter the womb to be born over again. Jesus neglects to tell Nicodemus that he does not mean reincarnation by being born again. The Church says that when Jesus said "born of water and spirit... the wind blows where it will, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (vs. 5-8)" he clearly did correct him. But reincarnation believers say that when we are reborn it can happen anywhere just like the wind can happen anywhere. We have an example here of Jesus seeming to confirm the misunderstanding as true.

In John 4:34 Jesus uses the word for food as a metaphor for doing the will of God. The disciples urge Jesus to eat. He says, "I have food to eat which you do not know." The disciples ask each other if anyone had brought any food. They thought he had to bring his own food because they had forgotten to bring it. It is said that Jesus corrected their misunderstanding in verse 34 by saying, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." But that need not necessarily be read as a correction. He might have been just saying it. It shows however that he used food to picture spiritual things such as having a relationship with God. Jesus uses leaven to picture the teaching of the Pharisees and the

scribes in the other gospels.

FINALLY

The Jew's question could have been a sneer or rhetorical. The chapter can be read as Jesus ignoring them. There is no need to assume that what he said after the question was an answer. The Catholic lynchpin for transubstantiation then fails.