

## Historic Commentary



(Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost - Year B)

The Liturgy Letter

---

### Commentary on John 6:24-35 from Selected Church Fathers

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on John 6](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the Patristics and others.

[Augustine](#): So he who had fled to the mountain mixes and converses with the multitude. Only a little while before they would have kept him and made him king.... But after the sacrament of the miracle, he begins to teach ... and fills their souls with his word whose bodies he had just satisfied with bread—provided they take it in. And if they do not, let that be taken up which they do not receive so that the fragments may not be lost.

It is as if he said, “You seek me to satisfy the flesh, not the Spirit.” How many seek Jesus for no other objective than to get some kind of temporal benefit! One has a business that has run into problems, and he seeks the intercession of the clergy; another is oppressed by someone more powerful than himself, and he flies to the church. Another desires intervention with someone over whom he has little influence. One person wants this, and another person wants that. The church is filled with these kinds of people! Jesus is scarcely sought after for his own sake.... Here too he says, you seek me for something else; seek me for my own sake. He insinuates the truth that he himself is that food ... “that endures to eternal life.”

[Chrysostom](#): To “take no thought” does not mean “not to work” but “not to be nailed to the things of this life.” In other words, do not worry about tomorrow’s comfort; in fact, consider it superfluous. There are those who do no work and yet lay up treasures for tomorrow. There are also others who do work and yet are careful for nothing. Carefulness and work are not the same thing. People do not work because they trust in their work but so that they may give to the person who is in need.

[Hilary of Poitiers](#): It is the nature of a seal to exhibit the whole form of the figure graven on it and that an impression taken from it reproduces it in every respect. And since it receives the whole of that which is impressed, it displays also in itself entirely whatever has been impressed on it. Yet this comparison is not adequate to exemplify the divine birth, because seals presuppose matter, difference of nature and an act of impression where the likeness of stronger nature’s is impressed on things of a more yielding nature.... What God had sealed should display in itself none other than the form of the God who

sealed it...As far as his being in the form of God by virtue of God's seal on him, he still remained God. But inasmuch as he was to take the form of a servant and become obedient unto death, not grasping at his equality with God, he emptied himself through obedience to take the form of a slave. And he emptied himself of the form of God, that is, of that in which he was equal with God—not that he regarded his equality with God as any encroachment—although he was in the form of God and equal with God and sealed by God as God.

Cyril of Alexandria: The countenance of God the Father is the Son who is the imprint of God. But the light of God is the grace that passes into creation through the Spirit, by which we are refashioned to God through faith. We receive through God, as with a seal, the being conformed to his Son.

Ambrose: [Christ] is our seal, which is the mark of perfection and of love because the Father, loving the Son, set his seal on him.

Chrysostom: He calls this the “true bread,” not because the miracle of the manna was false but because it was a type and not the very truth itself. But in mentioning Moses, Jesus does not compare himself with him, for the Jews did not as yet prefer him to Moses, of whom they still had a higher opinion. So that after saying, “Moses did not give,” he does not say “I give” but says that the Father, and not Moses, gives. When they heard this, the people replied, “Give us this bread to eat.” They still thought that it was something material, and they yet expected to satisfy their appetites, and so they quickly ran to him. And what does Christ do? Leading them on little by little, he says, “The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Ephrem the Syrian: From a little bread, our Lord made an abundance of bread in the midst of the desert, and in Cana he turned water into wine. At first he set out to give instruction to their mouths about his bread and wine, until the time came for him to give them his blood and his body also. He gave them the taste of a superabundance of transitory bread and wine in order to give them an eager desire for the superabundance of his living body and blood. He gave them these lesser things without price, so that they might know that this gift of his, of highest value, was free. He gave to them freely those things that they were able to purchase from him at a price. He therefore did not sell to them anything that they were able to buy, so that they might know that there was no fee he required from them for that which they did not have; for they were able to pay the price of his bread and wine, but they could not pay the price of his body and blood. It was in this way that he not only gave to us freely, but he was even enticing us as well; for he gave these lesser things freely to captivate us to come and receive this of highest value, which is without price. These lesser things that he gave of bread and wine delighted the mouth; that [highest gift] of body and blood brings aid to the mind. He captivated us with these things, which bring pleasure to the palate, in order to draw us to that which brings life to [our] souls. For this reason, he hid the sweetness in the wine he made, so that they might know what treasure is hidden in his life-giving blood.

Tertullian: For Christ is our Bread because Christ is Life, and bread is life. “I am,” says he, “the Bread of life.” And, a little above he says, “The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven.” Then we find, too, that his body is reckoned in bread: “This is my body.” And so, in petitioning for “daily bread,” we ask for perpetuity in Christ and indivisibility from his body. But, because “bread” is admissible in a carnal sense too, it cannot be so used without the religious remembrance of spiritual discipline. For the Lord commands that bread be prayed for which is the only food necessary for believers.

Cyril of Alexandria: In effect, Jesus is saying, “I am the bread of life,” not bodily bread, which merely eliminates the physical suffering brought on by hunger, but rather that bread that refashions the entire living being to eternal life. The human being, who had been created for eternal life, is now given power over death.

Cyril of Alexandria: What then does Christ promise? Nothing corruptible, but rather that blessing in the participation of his holy flesh and blood that restores humanity wholly to incorruption so that it should need none of the things that normally drive off the death of the flesh, for example, food and drink.... The holy body of Christ gives life to those who have it within themselves, and by holding them together, [it] grants incorruption, inasmuch as it is commingled with our bodies.... Since these things are so, let those who have been baptized and tasted the divine grace understand this: if they are sluggish or reluctant about going to church and for long periods of time keep away from the eucharistic gift through Christ, feigning a pernicious reverence by not partaking of him sacramentally, they exclude themselves from eternal life inasmuch as they decline to be enlivened. Thus, their refusal [to partake of the Eucharist] though seeming to be an expression of reverence, is turned into a snare and an offense.

Ambrose: [Christ] is a rich treasure, for his bread is rich. And “rich” is an apt term, for one who has eaten this bread will be unable to feel hunger. He gave it to the apostles to distribute to a believing people, and today he gives it to us. For he, as a priest, daily consecrates it with his own words. Therefore this bread has become the food of saints.