

**6pm Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

**Isaiah 60 and John 6:51-69 – by faith in the Father, Son and Spirit, Jesus' flesh and blood brings believers eternal life**

Reading and listening to our Gospel reading, it could easily be misunderstood. Do pick up a bible and let's have a look at it again, in John chapter 6, verses 51 to 69.

We could think that when Jesus talks about those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man he is talking about the Eucharist, about taking communion. But John can't be referring to the Eucharist here.

Not because, as suggested by some commentators, the Greek word translated as "flesh" is σαρξ, and not the Greek word, σωμα, used by Jesus in Mark 14 and Luke 22 when instituting the Lord's Supper, and which is usually translated as "body".

No, there are three much better reasons for thinking that John is not referring to communion but rather to Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross. Better reasons for believing that it is Jesus' death on the cross that has the power to save and to give eternal life, and not taking communion.

First, there is the fact that John, way back in chapter 1, has John the Baptist describing Jesus as ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***. So no surprise then, that John notes Jesus talking about giving his flesh ***for the life of the world***.

Second, there is the fact that a few verses before this, in v40, John records Jesus saying that ***all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life***.

And third, we have Jesus saying (v54) ***those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day***. So taking communion is not enough, in and of itself, for us to enjoy eternal life.

Of course, I'm not saying that taking communion isn't important.

Nor am I saying that the wafers and the wine cannot be to us, in some mysterious way, the body and blood of Jesus.

In fact, with only very slight variations, in all our communion services throughout the year, we say a prayer that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine may be to us Christ's body and his blood to us.

You'll find that prayer in our green booklet for Ordinary Time, in our yellow Festivals booklet, in our purple booklet for Epiphany, and in our white booklet for a baptism service.

And in the prayer of humble access from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, which we sometimes say on other occasions, we ask that, as we eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood, our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his precious blood.

But it is not the act of taking communion that will save our souls or give us eternal life. Only believing in the saving power of Jesus' death on the cross can do that.

And when we do have such faith, it is by the grace of God, and not by our own efforts. We have such faith through the work of each person within our Trinitarian God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (It is always good for us to notice when the gospels provide us with evidence of the Trinity, and here is a perfect example.)

We live by faith in the Father, who we see in v57 **sent his Son** to offer up his earthly life by allowing his body, literally his flesh, to be put on the cross.

We live by faith in the Son, the Son who v56 tells us **lives because of the Father**, because in the resurrection the Father restored the Son's flesh to life.

We live by faith in the Spirit; the Spirit who discloses and then dislodges our pride, fanning our feeble faith until it catches fire, and then guiding us and teaching us. As Jesus tells us in v63, we need the Spirit, because **it is the Spirit that gives life**; without the Spirit **the flesh is useless**.

When we are able to trust that Jesus' death on the cross has the power to give us eternal life, it is because the Father has given us the Spirit; for as Jesus said (v65), **no one can come to Jesus unless it is granted by the Father**.

So we see how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all play their part in our believing that Jesus gave his flesh and blood for us, that we might have eternal life, and might abide in him, as he abides in us.