Devotional Reflection, Monday, August 24. 2026
Proper 16, the week of the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D

Getting Out of Our Heads

Key phases for reflection from today's reading:
52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 981)
AM Psalm 1, 2, 3; PM Psalm 4, 7
Job 4:1,5:1-11,17-21,26-27; Acts 9:19b-31; John 6:52-59

Today we celebrate the Feast of Bartholomew. (See below.)

David's Reflections

Leonard Griffith once observed in a sermon, "Christ does not ask that we understand him. He asks only that we turn to him and believe that he can help us."* In this Gospel reading, Jesus leads us out into the place of the unknown, the place beyond our intellect and experience, the place beyond our understanding, a place where we have never trod. I think of it, not as an anti-intellectual place, but rather as a supra-intellectual place, a place beyond intellect. We may find ourselves shaking our heads at the hard words of Jesus and not willing to follow him beyond the edge of our light and the limits of our intellects. But, let's hope that's not the last stop on our intellectual pilgrimage.

In today's Gospel, Jesus followers were stumbling over his hard or rough or difficult words. He had made some rather radical statements about the extent to which he descended--he had come from heaven and become fully human and was indeed the bread from heaven that gives life ("flesh and blood" is a Hebrew idiom for a person, a human being). They must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have life.

We hear echoes from the worship of the writer(s) of John's Gospel, echoes of Holy Eucharist in this reading. Jesus makes himself fully available--he descends into bread and wine to such an extent that they become his flesh and blood.

When his listeners complained that they did not understand his giving them his flesh to eat (v. 52), Jesus did not explain. Rather, he doubled down, offering more tough and challenging words. Perhaps there's a hint here that when we're confused about some spiritual truth or biblical passage, our confusion constitutes God's invitation to get out of our heads into the realm of mystery and acceptance. We have come face to face with mystery, reality beyond our intellectual grasp.

These words are hard indeed. This sense of God's presence uniquely active in Jesus' life led his Jewish monotheistic followers to worship him and to attribute deity to him, which was the beginning of reflection about Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. John 6 quotes Jesus as saying that unless people ate his flesh and drank his blood they would not have eternal life – a rather audacious claim that sounds even more pretentious in a pluralistic culture like ours where many will struggle with such an absolute claim.

There are other hard words in Jesus teaching about topics like relationships, oppression of the poor, moral integrity, financial accountability of all of us to God, and acceptance of those forced to the margins by the resentment of the culture. Do we feel their hardness, their roughness? Can we get out of our heads and avoid weakening those demands with our rationalizations?

Do we also understand that Jesus' presence in bread and wine and the power and energy of his words afford us nurture and strength to struggle with the tension his hard words create? In that strength, we will be enabled to continue our walk with Jesus in spite of our faltering intellects and our divided wills. The earliest disciples did so. Grace will get us out of our heads.

Methodist New Testament scholar, Walter Wink, wrote a powerful essay about reading and understanding the Bible. The link to that essay is included below. In the closing paragraph he wrote:

> My deepest interest in encountering Jesus is not to confirm my own prejudices (though I certainly do that) but to be delivered from a stunted soul, a limited mind, and an unjust social order. No doubt a part of me wants to whittle Jesus down to my size so that I can avoid painful, even costly change. But another

> part of me is exhilarated by the possibility of becoming more human. So I listen in order to be transformed. . . .I respond though I must change. And in my better moments, I respond *in order to change.*+

His closing sentence has lived in my spirit and deepened my sense of awe about Jesus. "Truth is, had Jesus never lived, we could not have invented him."+

* Leonard Griffith, *Encounters With Christ* (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 30.
+Walter Wink, " A Personal and Social Transformation through Scripture," February 2004. https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/Wink_Transformation

Collect of the Day, Proper 16, the thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 232-233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Bartholomew. the Apostle.
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Bartholomew.htm

Collect of the Feast of Bartholomew
Almighty and everlasting God, who gave to your apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach your Word: Grant that your church may love what he believed and preach what he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for the Renewal of Life
O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 99)

A Prayer for Seeing Others as Community
Gracious God, thank you for the diversity of human beings that surround me on every side. In the ideas, in the hopes, in the dreams, and in the struggles of those who share this earthly life, let me find that through a community of human beings I am made fuller and more alive. Let the fullness given by community give me the courage to offer my own unique self with humility to the lives of others. As we all

share in the life that you have so graciously given us, may we be the lights of your love to one another. *Amen.* Copyright ©1999-2007 explorefaith.org
http://www.explorefaith.org/prayer/essays/communitypray.html

A Collect for the Presence of Christ
Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. *Amen*. (BCP, 124)

A Collect for Mission
O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100, 257)

Daily Office Gospel, John 6:52-59
52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' 59He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer
Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*