



TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 25, 2024

St. James Catholic Church

*3909 Harrison * Kansas City, Missouri 64110*

"Small enough to know your name, big enough to make a difference."

Reflection from Clink Thomson

Are you normal? Check one answer: yes, no, intermittent.

The 6th chapter of John that we've read for the last few weeks is not normal. It is no wonder that some of the disciples in today's gospel say, This is hard to endure. After all, Jesus, especially according to John, talks funny. "Unless a man be born again." "I am the bread of life." "If you eat my flesh, you will live forever." Who talks like that?

We need help with this ancient poetry. The lectionary is set up to help us. The first reading picks up a theme that situates us in the tradition the Gospel assumes. The tradition is that the experience of the presence of God nourishes our life.

We recently read that Wisdom is a kind of food. "Wisdom has dressed her meat and mixed her wine: yes, she has set her table." That kind of understanding is highly poetical; we don't normally think of wisdom as food.

So when Jesus says he is bread or we have to eat his flesh, we have to realize this startling language has a tradition that we are not normally comfortable with, even as we sing, "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord." It is especially hard for Americans who don't "normally" use poetry to communicate. You can watch TV all day and never hear someone talking in rhyme or even use vivid metaphors. The weatherman and the news anchor "talk normal" – that is, plain English (prose).

If a child comes home with the lament that she is flunking poetry, it is not likely she will be immediately enrolled in summer school. But, if her brother flunks math, remedies will be found.

This explains St. James. We are poetic. When you walk in, the sign says we pray with our feet, an anatomical difficulty unless you understand the relationship between prayer and action. The two dozen (and counting) flags on the back wall don't make sense except to the children of Pentecost. You may think we are weird (not normal) because we respond to the petitions in Igbo (an ethnicity in the Southeastern part of Nigeria) - a language we don't understand. But, I'm told some St. James parishioners are from the Igbo tribe who do their whole liturgy in an ancient language we don't understand. Poetry is open and flexible: under Robert's magic fingers, we move easily from the sedate medieval "Ubi Caritas" to a rocking "Ride, Jesus Ride." At St. James, that's normal.

So, are you normal?