

August 22, 2021

Jos 24:1-2a,15-17,18b; Eph 5:21-32 (short); Jn 6:60-69

Why did many of Jesus' disciples walk away? There is a great temptation for all of us to just walk away when things get difficult or we get confused. The number of divorces in early years of marriage, the way people change jobs so frequently these days, the way people can so willingly write someone off for their mistakes or poorly chosen words. The secret to happiness in situations where it is difficult or confusing is not necessarily to change the scenery, as to change perspective. It is in finding the perspective of truth that things can really change.

In this whole section of the Gospel of John that we have been hearing, Jesus is speaking about Himself as the Bread of Life, he says He is the Manna come down from heaven. He says that we must feed on his flesh and blood in order to truly live. All this can be taken figuratively - the Bread of life being a spiritual or mental sustenance, His word feeding us like the Manna in the desert fed the wandering Israelites. The whole crowd could get behind this. Then he says that His flesh is real food and His Blood real drink. The people question this, and rather than clarify by saying: "Oh yuck, sorry, did you think I meant my real Body and Blood, it was just a metaphor" he turns and says with emphasis *Amen, amen* (that means "very truly," or "I'm not kidding"), *I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.* He then goes on and says it yet again that His Body and Blood are real food and drink, and finally concludes: *Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.* Sounds like he is not trying to make a metaphor. This is the saying that is so hard that they think no one can accept it.

So what do you do when you encounter something from Jesus that seem to hard to accept? A lot of what He says is challenging. A lot of what He says goes against the grain, it pushes us to places that are hard (Love your enemies, Surrender your needs for material things, come follow me). So what do we do when pushed against the grain. We see in the Gospel that many leave Him - they walk away. This is yet another proof that those people listening to Him knew by His tone of voice, expressions, and what else he was saying that he was serious about eating His Body and Blood. So if you don't like this you could walk away. Many have walked away from the practice of the faith, But this separates you from the truth spoken by Jesus and from the family of believers that he calls us to be. Your rejection doesn't change the reality.

What else could you do? ... You could change what he said to make it easier to take. This is what the crowd may have been doing at first. If it is a metaphor, then we can take it. You

could pick out one or two passages and make the case that Jesus was talking symbolically - this has been done by some of our Protestant brothers and sisters. But if you take the whole section together, and read it against other things he says, you really can't go there. You have to either take what He is saying (even though you don't fully get it), or you have to change it into something else that is easier for you to understand - in which case you change it. Or you walk away and lose the whole truth that He is trying to communicate. This is a choice.

Joshua puts that choice before the Israelites in the first reading: *decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites ... [but] As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.* You can put to us this way: decide today who you will serve, the gods of the secular culture that promise a full life without God, or the gods of your own self-will and personal tastes, but - my friends - I will serve the Lord! Because there is a God and this God has communicated to us in the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit, and in the person of Jesus Christ. I will serve the Lord because I know I don't know everything, and the judge of something being real is not that I can totally understand it. I will serve the Lord because I know that the path to true human fulfillment is laid out by the One who created us and who is trying to guide us to that fulfillment. Instead of running away because of doubts, or trying to rework Jesus' words so they seem right to me, we be like Peter. He didn't get what Jesus was saying any more than the others. But he does not argue, he says: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* In other words, I may not get it, but what I do know is that what you are saying has got to be true, and I will go with you in my doubt. I can believe that to love my enemy and turn from sin will bring me a better life, and that the even more hard things to believe are truths that will lead to my fulfillment.

Jesus says: *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.* Today in this Mass we enter into that mystery. Don't worry if you don't fully get it, just have faith in the words of Jesus. As you hear his words saying "this is my Body, this is my Blood," as you approach to receive that Body and Blood be thankful. You don't have to understand fully to take advantage of the gift. Pray after receiving Him that He fill your whole person with that presence and enlighten you to understand His ways better. Pray that you be given the strength of Joshua to firmly decide to follow, and the faith of Peter to take what He says and believe it even when you don't understand. The way to the mysterious God is through mystery, and part of this mystery is that the way to eternal life is through the Body and Blood that he gives us today. The strength to follow him, and the very Manna come from heaven is here: so relax, believe, partake, and draw others to enter into this great mystery of God's life.