

Holy One of God
21st Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)
(Jn 6:60-69)

“*There are some of you who do not believe*” (Jn 6:64). At the end of the “Bread of Life” discourse in John chapter 6, Jesus returns to the theme with which he began: faith. Many of the crowd stopped following him because of the scandalous way he spoke of giving them his flesh and blood as real food and drink. Jesus had begun the discourse by urging them to labor for the true heavenly bread, a labor which is the work of faith: “*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent*” (Jn 6:29).

The real test of faith, however, is not for the confused and scandalized crowd. Even though they witnessed the great miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish, their faith in him would not come until the event by which “*Son of Man ascends to where he was before*” (Jn 6:62), that is, until after his Resurrection and Ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The words he spoke today about the Bread of Life, himself, being real food and actual drink (Jn 6:55), cannot be appreciated or understood by mere human thinking – “*the flesh is of no avail*” (Jn 6:63). They require the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the institution of sacramental life within the Church. It will be in the future “Breaking of Bread” that the crowd will eventually come to faith and recognize that the words he spoke are true (Lk 24:35). The Father will draw (Jn 6:65) the crowd and all mankind to Christ in the age of Pentecost, by the preaching of the Apostles and the growth of the Church.

But at this juncture, one year before his death and Resurrection (cf. Jn 6:4), the real test of faith was for his apostles. Jesus needed them to come to faith before the Resurrection, since they would be the witnesses of the Resurrection and the foundation of the Church. Thus, for them it was not enough to see the multiplication of loaves and fish, they also saw him walking on the waters the night before (Jn 6:19-20).

As the crowd dwindles away in disgust, Jesus challenges the twelve: “*will you leave me too?*” (Jn 6:67). As in the great profession of faith of Matthew’s Gospel (cf. Mt 16:16), it is Peter who speaks, and speaks on behalf of all: “*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God*” (Jn 6:68-69). This confession beautifully expresses the faith upon which the Church is established, a faith which is the supernatural gift of the Father.

We can never intellectually grasp the mysteries of faith, such as the mechanics of how Sacraments become what they signify, or how the Eternal Son

of God could become man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but we nevertheless know these mysteries to be real and true, because we do grasp *who* this man is: the Holy One of God. We cannot understand how, but we know that. The crowd leaves because they cannot understand “*how* can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52) The apostles stay because they know *that* “you have the words of eternal life... you are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6:68-69).

John chapter 6 sets forth the mystery of the Eucharist, Jesus Christ the Living Bread come down from heaven to give eternal life to those who believe in him. A thousand years later, St. Thomas puts this Catholic faith into poetry in the liturgical hymns composed for the Feast of the Eucharist, Corpus Christi. Among them is “*Adoro te devote*”

*Adoro te devote, latens deitas,
Quæ sub his figuris vere latitas;
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia te contemplans totum deficit.*

I devoutly adore you, hidden deity,
Who are truly hidden beneath these appearances.
My whole heart submits to You,
because in contemplating You, it is fully
deficient.

*Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur.
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius;
Nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.*

Sight, touch, taste all fail in their judgment of
you,
But hearing suffices firmly to believe.
I believe all that the Son of God has spoken;
There is nothing truer than this word of Truth.