

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time + 25 August 2024 + Josh 24 + Eph 5 + Jn 6:60-69

We have finally come to the end of our 5-week journey through John chapter 6 in our Gospel here at Mass. Last weekend, we talked about just how difficult Jesus' words were to believe in their original context. And so today we hear today the devastating result of the whole of the "Bread of Life" discourse: *As a result of this, many of [Jesus'] disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.*

Last weekend, we also spoke about how Jesus' claims are proven true in the light of the last supper, the cross, and resurrection. But how difficult it would have been for someone to believe Jesus' words prior to all of these events, including the disciples. Which is why the profession of St. Peter is so powerful: *Lord, to whom shall we go? He says, You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.* The disciples don't completely *understand* all of Jesus' teachings at this point. Their faith was still weak. But still, they believed. It's the same for us. We may not completely understand, and yet we believe. Only in Jesus Christ do we find *the words of eternal life.*

In particular, regarding the Eucharist, if our Catholic faith is wrong, we would have heard Jesus say something like, *"ok guys, don't freak out. I'm using symbolic language. Come back!"* But in fact, He doesn't retract His prior words one iota. Rather, Jesus doubles down. He says, *The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life, but there are some of you who do not believe.* And indeed He is right. Tragically, even today many walk away from Him.

And this is indeed a tragedy, because you can run to the farthest ends of the world chasing after happiness--money, fame, bodily pleasure, power. But those things can never satisfy our unquenchable desires, because they always come to an end. As we said last week, the Eucharist is the answer to the deepest desires of every human heart: perfect love, and eternal life. We receive a pledge of this future glory each time we eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood offered *for us* in the Eucharist. We have a little bit of heaven here on earth in our Catholic Churches, and yet so many prefer earthly delights to Him.

As you have probably heard me say before, we now in year 3 of a 3-year-long "Eucharistic revival" in the US. Year 3 is called the "Year of Mission." The idea here is that once we have encountered the Lord Jesus, once we have come to believe that He is the Son of God and the only way to eternal life, this should have a profound impact on every aspect of our lives. It should open us to workings of grace and make us more like the One whom we receive in the Eucharist. And it should send us forth on mission: to spread this good news with those who either don't believe, or perhaps have lost their faith along the way. And that's not easy. The good news is indeed *very good*—the best news imaginable, but it is also hard. Christ demands conversion. Eventually, He demands a choice: will you follow me or not? And some just don't want to hear it. Immediately after this episode, we read in John's

Gospel that Jesus went about in Galilee but not in Judea, because the people *sought to kill Him* (7:1).

Our 1st Reading today from the Book of Joshua picks up on this theme that eventually Christ demands a choice to believe or not. There is a lot of pressure on the Church today to water down the Gospel, to reduce our faith to social justice, to present Jesus as merely nice guy who never challenges, never convicts of sins. But as St. Paul says in our 2nd reading, the *Church is subordinate to Christ*, and not to the culture. Now certainly, we never intend to offend. We should approach the unbelieving world with humility, goodwill, and Christlike love. But sometimes we have to say the hard things that people today do not want to hear. That's not intolerance, that's love. If your child wants to touch the glowing oven burner, you don't say, "well, if that's what you really *feel* like doing, who am I to judge?" No, if you truly love your child, you will say "stop! You'll hurt yourself!" even if they get angry at you.

We don't have many public leaders today who are willing, like Joshua in our 1st reading, to say the hard things that need to be said, or to unmask the false gods that want to advance evil agendas. Such as, how ending an innocent human life is now called "abortion care." Mutilating the body of a confused young person is called "gender affirming care." Making an unborn child into one's personal property is called "reproductive rights." Men in particular are often afraid to be the protectors of the vulnerable that they were created by God to be. As we hear in our 2nd reading today, men are called to be the heads of their families, not in domination, but in loving service: *as Christ loved [His bride], the Church*. That's a tall order. It's easier just to say and do nothing and just go with the flow, than to pick up the Cross.

I mention these things today because the essence of the Eucharist, the essence of love, is expressed in Christ's words: *this is my body, given up for you*. This goes to the very heart of the Christian message. And it can sound terrifying until we believe that Christ not only gave us our bodies at birth, but He died in *His own body* so that even though we will die, we will be raised again in glorified bodies on the last day. The world doesn't believe this, and so they have created this culture that either worships the body or throws it away, in the name of so-called "freedom." And they are doing all they can to silence any contrary voices. Far too many self-identifying Christians—even many Catholics, some in the highest offices of government, have pledged allegiance to this false gospel, this false god.

But if we really love the world as Christ does, we can't just sit back and do nothing. That's very tempting, but we are called to and we must give witness to life, because life matters to God. Jesus Christ is the solution to this ancient problem. So the best way we can protect life is to live and speak the way He would have us: by knowing His words and speaking with Him everyday in prayer and receiving His grace in the Sacraments, praying for the conversion of hearts and for our elected officials. But we also need to give public witness. How? Share your faith. Support life-affirming pregnancy centers, and groups who care for those hurting after abortion. Vote, call, and write to our legislators. Put a statue of Mary,

the Mother of God, prominently in your yard. Put a pro-life sign in your yard too. Yes, we are a small town, but there is no limit to the light that we can together shine by proclaiming *as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*