

August 26, 2018  
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time  
John 6:60-69

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "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."

#### Background:

This is the fifth and last week that the gospel text is taken from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. The chapter began with the crowd seeking Jesus out after he had crossed the Sea of Galilee. Jesus responded to the crowd in two ways: by feeding them with the barley loaves and fish, and with his teaching. Within Jesus' teaching they heard him claim that he was the bread of life come down from heaven, and all that that implied. But his teaching proved to be too much for them. This chapter ends in the opposite way that it began, with the crowds departing Jesus' company. The last verses of the chapter then focus not on the crowd but on the twelve disciples and their response to Jesus' teaching.

The text for this Sunday begins where the gospel text from last Sunday ended. Only one line is omitted, which states that Jesus was teaching these things in the synagogue in Capernaum. (John 6:59) Jesus has reinterpreted the "manna tradition" of their ancestors and identified his flesh as the bread from heaven that gives life. The last section of the chapter focuses on the disciples, Jesus' own followers, and their response to his teaching. They find it hard to accept Jesus' claim that he is the Son of Man who has come down from heaven. Jesus' response to their difficulty is not to soften his claim or to try to make his teaching more acceptable. Rather, he confronts them with another question. If they have trouble believing that he has come down from heaven, what would they think if they saw him ascend up into heaven? It is a hypothetical question. Jesus is also suggesting that "seeing is not the same as believing." The disciples have seen Jesus do some extraordinary things, yet they are having real difficulty in believing what he is teaching them. Faith is not natural, nor does it come easily. Some of the disciples decide to leave.

Jesus is not indifferent to their departure. He turns to the twelve and asks them what they are going to do. He asks them about their intentions. He leaves them free, not asking them to stay nor saying that they have permission to leave. Instead, he asks them what they want to do. Peter, the spokesperson, makes three statements that seem to move toward a deeper faith and a deeper commitment to following Jesus.

- "...To whom else 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." (John 6:68-69)

Even though these three statements follow one after the other, it took the early Christians more than a generation to come to this understanding of Jesus that John recorded in his sixth chapter.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. When I think of times in my life when I have had misgivings or doubts...

2. Have you ever felt stuck, like it was too late to start over or to try an alternative approach? What have been the blessings and the burdens of being aware that you had run out of options?
3. Jesus' response to the murmuring of the people in today's gospel...
4. If Jesus would turn to you and ask, "do you too want to leave," you would respond ...
5. How do you feel when people leave the church?
6. Can you talk to God now about your own struggle to remain faithful, or about those who have chosen to live without faith in God, or about some other issue that arose within you from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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#### **Excerpts from the readings for August 26, 2018, the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, judges, and officers. Joshua addressed them: "If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."  
The people answered, "It was the Lord, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among the peoples through whom we passed. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the Lord; the lowly will hear me and be glad.  
The Lord has eyes for the just, and ears for their cry. The Lord confronts the evildoers. When the just cry out, the Lord hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them.  
The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.  
Many are the troubles of the just one, but out of them all the Lord delivers him; he watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken.

Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.  
Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body.  
As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "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."

**Excerpts from Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18; Psalm 34:2-3, 16-21; Ephesians 5:21-32; and John 6:60-69**