

August 22, 2021  
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:**

Usually, this Sunday would have been the fifth week that the gospel text was taken from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. The celebration of the feast of the Assumption of Mary last Sunday created an unusual break in the liturgical cycle. The sixth chapter of John begins with the crowd seeking Jesus 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. "The Jews murmured about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven' and they said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?... Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" (John 6:41-42)

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 difficulty in believing what he is teaching them. Faith is not natural, nor does it come easily.

Jesus is not indifferent to the departure of some of his disciples. He turns to the twelve and asks them what they are going to do. He asks them about their intentions. He leaves them free to decide for themselves, 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. Are there things about the Catholic Church about which you would like to say, "These things are hard to accept?"
2. How would it help you if there was someone in the Church to actually say that to?
3. For you, are the hardest parts about being Catholic matters of faith or of practice?
4. For you, what are the best parts of the Catholic Faith and tradition?

5. If Jesus would turn to you and ask, "Why do you stay?" how would you respond?
6. Can you talk to God now about how you see yourself as being a faithful disciple, and how you would like it to be (if you are not living the discipleship that you would like to now)?

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)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for August 22, 2021, 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**

**From Joe:**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for August 22nd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel continues again from John chapter six, which we heard from for three weeks before last Sunday's feast day. The disciples were finding it hard to accept when Jesus explained that he is the Bread of Life, and that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Many of the disciples left him at this point. Jesus asks the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter replies, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life—you are the Holy One of God."

The other readings also make reference to deciding who to serve and love. In the first reading, Joshua tells the assembled leaders of all Israel, "If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Psalm 34 declares, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Taste and see how good the Lord is." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. A man shall leave his father and 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."

Joe