

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday we hear the conclusion of Christ's teaching on the Holy Eucharist as found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. The passage tells us about one of the most tragic, but also one of the most glorious moments in the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the tragedy and the glory of this moment have been repeated millions of times down through the ages.

The tragedy is that at the conclusion of Christ's teaching on the Holy Eucharist, after He has told His disciples that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have His life in them, and to experience eternal life, many of His disciples refused to believe Him. "This teaching is too much to endure...how can anyone take it seriously" they said.

And from that moment on, these disciples of Jesus broke with Him and refused to follow Him anymore.

How sad Jesus must have been to see them leave for they had made a tragic mistake. Instead of putting their complete trust in Christ, and believing His word because it is His word, they would only trust Jesus as far as His teaching was comfortable for them and conformed to what they thought was rational or understandable. Once Jesus Christ challenged their way of thinking, once He made them uncomfortable, they rejected Him. They voted with their feet and walked out.

And this tragedy is continually repeated. There are still many who claim to follow Christ, but when they hear His teaching on the Eucharist, on eating His Body and drinking His Blood, they too say, "How can anyone take this teaching seriously?" And they go through all sorts of mental gymnastics in an attempt to explain Christ's words away. And it doesn't end with the Eucharist. In the Gospels Jesus consistently upholds the importance of keeping the Ten Commandments and that sin is real. He tells us that we must love our neighbors, especially the poor, as we love ourselves; that we must reject violence, and forgive our enemies; that we cannot serve God and money too, and that we also must bear the cross of rejection and ridicule if we are to follow Him. And yet how many there are who call themselves Christians who do not accept these teachings.

It is understandable of course that we often fail to practice what Jesus teaches. We are all poor sinners and the Lord knows this and forgives the sins we confess. But it is quite another to reject what Jesus says by trying to explain it away, or by saying that it is no longer relevant which is what many half-hearted believers do today. At least the people who quit on Jesus in the Gospel were honest enough to accept that He means what He says and that they had to either take or leave it. The tragedy is that some people, even among the followers of Jesus, refuse to accept His word completely. To believe in Jesus Christ means to believe that He alone is the holy One of God and the final authority on what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, even when His words are hard and make us uncomfortable. It is truly sad when people reject our Lord's teaching.

But this dialogue in St. John's Gospel presents to us a moment of glory as well, a glory that has been repeated millions of times, and hopefully is being repeated in our lives right here and now. St. John tells us that after the one group of disciples left Jesus, He turned to the Apostles to see what they would do. We have to recognize how hard it must have been for St. Peter and the other Apostles in order to see the glory of this moment. Peter and the other Apostles were just as challenged and uncomfortable by Jesus' words as the others and the ones who left Jesus over His teaching on the Eucharist were undoubtedly their friends. The words of Jesus were dividing them and if they accepted His word they would be separated from people they cared about. And here is Jesus looking right at them and putting them on the spot. The moment of truth, "Do you want to leave Me too?" He asks. Jesus is telling them, "If you want to follow Me you must accept my word completely."

And every time we are tempted to doubt, twist or ignore His word, Jesus puts the same question to us, "Do you want to leave Me too?" There can be no compromises with the teachings of Christ. It's all or nothing, His way or no way. We must follow Him whole-heartedly for He will have no half-hearted followers.

And in this moment of truth, a moment that comes eventually for every would be disciple, St. Peter stepped forward and said the words that Christ wants all of us to say and put into practice: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Peter and the Apostles made their choice and it is the choice that Jesus calls us to make. In spite of the fact that we don't always understand the ways of the Lord, that His word challenges us and makes us uncomfortable, that following Him can mean separation from friends and even family. We are not looking for rejection and ridicule but we know that we must follow Jesus. There is no one else for us to go to, or believe, or put our trust in, or live our lives for, or give our hearts to, only Jesus Christ. For only Jesus has the words of eternal life. The same Jesus who has guaranteed His words by giving us His crucified Body to eat and His saving Blood to drink.

A moment of tragedy and glory. So what will it be for us? "This sort of talk is hard to endure?" or "Lord, you have the words of eternal life."

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley