

# Scripture Study

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time—Cycle B



## Opening prayer

Joshua 24: 1-2a, 15-17, 18b

(Ps 34:2-3, 16-23)

Ephesians 5:21-32

John 6:60-69

## Overview of the Gospel:

- We now come to the last in a series of readings from the Gospel of John, chapter 6 (next week we resume with the Gospel according to Mark). We return to the setting for these readings from John's gospel—the synagogue at Capernaum. The Passover is near (v. 4) and it is a year before Good Friday.
- Up to this point, Jesus' listeners have managed to accept several difficult claims by him—that he is the Messiah (verse 14), that if they believe in him he can raise them up to eternal life (verses 44, 47), and even that he is, somehow, bread (verse 51). With his announcement that his “flesh is true food,” his “blood is true drink” and “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (verse 55-56), many of his disciples reach the limits of their faith: “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” (verse 60)
- Jesus refuses to soften his message (verses 62-63) and does not, as he had done in the past (Mark 4:34), offer an explanation that could have kept his disciples from leaving (verse 67). He clearly meant what he said, and accepted the fact that some would not believe (verses 64-66). It was not long after this that Judas would decide to betray him (verses 70-71).

## Questions:

- To whom are Jesus' words in this passage directed? Does that make their reaction more, or less surprising? Why? Given *their* experience, what would have been *your* reaction?
- What is Jesus' immediate reaction to their defection (verses 61 and 64)? What does his reaction show about him?
- Read verse 61 (“does this shock you?” or, in another translation, “Do you take *offense* (Greek: *scandalon*, a stumbling block) at this?”) How are his listeners scandalized by Jesus' words about the Eucharist (CCC 1336)? Are there some people today scandalized by the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist? How? Why?
- Consider some of Jesus' “hard sayings” in the Gospels about living with God (Matthew 5:11, 27-28, 29-30, 31-32, 38-39, 43-44, 48). How do they apply to you? Have you ever tried to get God to change his mind? What was the result?
- In the First Reading, why did the Israelites feel they could put their trust in God (Joshua 24:17)? For the Apostles, what came first, *believing* or *knowing* (verses 67-69)? Does this mean that the Christian faith is anti-intellectual or irrational (CCC 2500)? What does it mean to be a true disciple of Jesus (verses 66 and 68; Luke 9:23ff.)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1336, 473, 728, 737, 1355

## Closing prayer

*“Let us in everything believe God, and gainsay him in nothing, though what is said be contrary to our hearts and senses...Let us act likewise in respect to the [eucharistic] mysteries, not looking at the things set before us, but keeping in mind his words. For his word cannot deceive.*

—St John Chrysostom (ca. 347—407)

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!**

# "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life"

**Scripture:** John 6:60-69

*Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

**Meditation:** When you encounter the difficult sayings of Jesus, how do you respond? With disbelief, indifference, or with a desire that seeks understanding? Jesus claimed to have full revelation of God and he backed this claim with many remarkable works of healing and miracles, including the miraculous feeding of five thousand people at one time. That is why many thousands sought Jesus out and were attracted to his teaching. He offered them something both tangible and irresistible – visible signs of God's mercy, kindness, and favor. Many stumbled, however, when Jesus made claims which only God could possibly make. Jesus' discourse on "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" (see John 6:51-59) – which pointed to the Last Supper and to the



unique bread of the Eucharist or Table of the Lord – caused offence to many of his followers. Jesus claimed to be the bread of heaven, the very life of God given to us as spiritual food to sustain us on our journey to the promised land of heaven. Jesus did not leave any middle ground for his hearers. They must either accept his word as divine or reject it as the claim of an imposter. Even the apostles admitted that this was a "hard saying". This expression meant that it was not just hard to understand, but hard to accept. Jesus pressed the issue with his beloved disciples because he wanted to test their faith, trust, and loyalty. Jesus promised his disciples nothing less than the full blessing of eternal life and union with God. Jesus assures his disciples that it is his heavenly Father who invites and who gives the grace to follow even in the "hard sayings". Jesus knew that some would not only reject him and his word, but would do so with great opposition, hatred and violence, even betraying him to his enemies.

It takes faith and trust to believe in Jesus and to accept his words. Real faith, however, is neither blind trust nor ignorant belief. Augustine of Hippo once said: "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." Faith and reason go together, because faith seeks understanding of God's truth and revelation. That is why God gives us the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is our instructor and

daily tutor in the wisdom and knowledge of God. Paul the Apostle teaches us to pray for understanding that God "may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened" (Ephesians 1:17-18). Faith is a personal response to God's revelation of himself to us. Jesus both reveals who God is and offers us a personal relationship with God as our heavening Father. Peter's profession of faith was based on the personal relationship he had with Jesus. He not only believed that Jesus had the divine authority to speak on behalf of God, and the power to perform signs and miracles in the name of God. Peter grasped, through the eyes of faith, that Jesus truly was the Messiah, the Holy One of God. Through the gift of faith Peter came to understand that Jesus was both God and man, sent into the world by the Father who loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son (John 3:16). Peter believed in the words which Jesus spoke, because he accepted Jesus as the Son of God and savior of the world. Faith is an entirely free gift of God which enables us to respond to God's word with trust because God is true and utterly reliable. Faith is the key to understanding and experiencing God at work in our daily personal lives. Do you believe, as Peter did, that Jesus can change your life because he has the *words of everlasting life*? Ask the Lord Jesus to increase your faith and understanding of his word that you may grow in the knowledge of his love and plan for your life.

*Lord Jesus, you have the words of everlasting life. Strengthen my faith and help me to cast aside all doubt, fear, and indifference to your word that I may obey it with trust and joy. May there be nothing in my life which separates me from your love and truth.*

