

Homily: 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday: 2015: Cycle B: Jos 24: 1-2, 15-17, 18; Eph 5: 21-32; Jn 6: 60-69

“To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

1. Today we come to the end of the Bread of Life discourse in St. John’s Gospel. The question we must ask ourselves is: **what is our response to Jesus’s teaching that He is going to give us His Flesh and Blood to eat, so that we can have His life within us?** The disciples hearing the discourse today were “**shocked**” by the words of Jesus Himself, thinking to themselves, “*this saying is hard; who can accept it?*” Jesus’s response to them was “*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.*” **As I said last week-end, Jesus took a huge risk on His part in giving us the miracle of the Eucharist, which is perpetuated at every Mass. He gives us this gift under the signs of bread and wine, but it is truly in substance His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.** As one of the little second graders said to me a few years ago, when I asked why Jesus gives us His body and blood under what to our senses seems like mere bread and wine, “*Jesus gives us His Body and Blood in this way because we would be grossed out if Holy Communion really tasted like flesh and blood.*” How true, from the mouths of babes! That goes without saying! But then I asked them, “*What is the danger here, in that, when we receive Holy Communion that it looks and tastes like bread and wine to our senses, even though we know by Faith that it is truly the Lord’s Body and Blood?*” One little girl said, “*that we won’t believe that it is really Jesus’s Body and Blood, but will just think it is a piece of bread and a drink of wine.*” Yes, it takes a deep faith to believe this reality; we must never take it for granted! And yet it is easy to fall into that trap. Remember Jesus saying we need to be trusting of Him, like little children, in order to enter into His Kingdom.
2. **This is not an easy doctrine: I remember as a teenager struggling with belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.** In my pre-conversion days, I just thought, when I did think about it once in a while, that it was too good to be true. Fortunately God in His mercy rescued me, and by the time I finished High School I starting having a deep faith in this reality, which I must now renew on a

daily basis when I celebrate Holy Mass. Why did I struggle with believing the Eucharist was truly Jesus's Body and Blood and not simply a symbol? **Well our belief in the Eucharist relates to other aspects of our spiritual life.** In my case I was in a kind of spiritual fog from the time I was 11 to the time I was 17 - *because I wasn't praying much, I was not making good honest Confessions when I did go once or twice a year at most, and was all about doing my will not God's. I was selfish and self-centered in basically every aspect of my life, looking back now. The Faith was not alive to me because my conscience was dull and I was rebellious in my heart toward God, wanting to do my own thing, and not being open or docile to the Holy Spirit.* **The change occurred** when I started to truly pray on a daily basis, especially the Rosary, and started to make good honest Confessions, as well as going to daily Mass when I could, and stopping in at my home parish St. Benedict's in Johnstown, during the week, to make visits to the Blessed Sacrament when I was at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Also watching some shows on E.W.T.N. on "Eucharistic miracles" helped immensely, as well as trying to serve God and others with my life, in charity, instead of constantly thinking what's in it for me in self-centered misery and blindness, which looking back was my sad life for a number of years as a teenager. **Please don't think this is unique to me, anyone here who has or wants a deep faith in the reality of Jesus in the Eucharist must realize it is a gift from God that we must pray for and work at on a daily basis; and it is not a belief that is in isolation from how we are living the rest of our lives. Our faith life and daily life must be harmonized; otherwise our faith life will be weak at best, esp. in regard to the Eucharist. That was the lesson I learned as a teenager.** If we don't harmonize our faith and daily life, one of two things will eventually happen over time: 1. a person will either totally drift away from the Catholic Church - we all know people in this boat and it breaks my heart as a pastor when I think of the many lapsed Catholics and try to reach out to them at different times, and usually they are not that interested in the Faith, as we hear today sadly in the Gospel, "*as a result of this, many of His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him*"; 2. or one may stay in the Catholic Church officially,

but will just go through the motions in relation to the Eucharist, thinking *it is just a nice symbol of the Last Supper*, and usually then the person will ignore much of the moral and spiritual teachings of the Catholic faith, skip Mass on occasion, and rarely if ever go to the Sacrament of Confession, and if they do, we won't necessarily reveal all of their sins. Obviously both of these false responses to the Eucharist are tragic, as the Lord literally wants to fill our hearts with His own life and love in the reality of the Eucharist, but how much we benefit depends on the extent of our Faith in His Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

3. The stark and direct question Jesus asks to the Twelve Apostles then, and to each of us now, is: *“Do you also want to leave?”* Jesus is asking them and us directly: *whom will you serve?* **We must decide**, like the people in the first reading today from Joshua, and the Twelve in the Gospel, **whom we will serve**, will it be the true God made known through our Catholic Faith or some substitute false earthly god (anything or anyone who is at the center of our hearts and lives who is not the true God)? **What a decision each of us has to make!** St. Peter speaks up boldly, hopefully for all of us from the depths of our hearts and souls when he says, *“Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced you are the Holy One of God.”* Many saints and scholars down through the ages have believed that very profession of Faith by Peter was the reason Jesus made him the rock on which He would build His Church – as the 1<sup>st</sup> Pope, despite all of Peter's other weaknesses, which are all so clear throughout the Gospels, particularly his denials the night of Holy Thursday. **What a profession of faith! May the Lord bless each and every one of us with that same gift!** The Eucharist is the source and summit of everything we do as Catholics. It fills us with Jesus's life and love, so we can be drawn more and more by Him into the union and embrace of the Blessed Trinity, and from there to go out and daily love our neighbor. It is the truly the food of eternal life. May we be blessed with an ever deeper faith and love for the Lord in the Eucharist on a daily basis, so that we can bring His love and truth into every aspect of our daily lives and to our spiritually starving world. God bless you.