

Homily: 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday: 2021: Cycle B: Jos 24: 1-2, 15-17, 18; Eph 5: 21-32; Jn 6: 60-69

***“Will we stay or will we leave?”***

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.*” **Jesus took a huge risk on His part in giving us the miracle of the Eucharist, which occurs 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. Yes, it takes a deep faith to believe this reality; we must never take it for granted, and make sure to never receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin. I printed the Fatima prayer of reparation to Jesus in the Eucharist last week and the week before in my bulletin column, I hope you cut it out and say it daily – if you accidentally missed it, look at it on the old bulletins section online on our Parish website and print it out. The spiritual danger always lurking is to think the Eucharist is mere food and drink or just a symbol of Jesus and the Last Supper. **It is so easy to fall into that trap, and if we do, it is so easy at some point to fall away from the Catholic faith.****

2. **But 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 teenage days of religious indifference, 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 of Jesus’s Real Presence in the Eucharist, a special gift, 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 my life was all about doing my will and 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 at 17, especially a set of the mysteries of the Rosary, and started to make good honest Confessions, as well as going to daily Mass when I started college at U.P.J. and stopping in regularly at my home parish St. Benedict's in Johnstown, during the week, to make visits to the Blessed Sacrament in between my college classes. 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, time, and money 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 7 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 live on a daily basis; and it is not a belief that is in isolation from how we are living the rest of our life.*

3. **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, it often happens in college 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 discover that 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.** A person 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, especially on sexual morality; skip Sunday Mass on occasion, and rarely if ever go to the Sacrament of Confession, and if they do go, they 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 Him in the Eucharist.** The stark and direct question Jesus asks in the Gospel today is: ***“Do you also want to leave?” Or not! We must decide***, like St. Peter, **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.”*

And remember If we are blessed with this gift of Faith, we need to also be concerned about the people we personally know who have fallen away from the practice of the Catholic faith – we can't just ignore them or let them go into the ways of falsehood. Invite them back regularly; and if they say no right now – keep praying and offering acts of reparation and penance, per Our Lady of Fatima, for the intention of the conversion of their souls. Remember what our Lady of Fatima said are the keys to converting souls – 1. ***Living in a spirit of Faith*** (*esp. in Mass - daily if possible – St Jacinta (8-9 years old) went to and offered it for the people who skip Sunday Mass) and for greater love for Jesus in the Eucharist*), 2. ***Prayer, esp. the daily Rosary***, 3. ***Daily spiritual sacrifices/acts of penance, and*** 4. ***Being a conduit of God's grace (regular Confession helps immensely with this)***. Belief and love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist brings us ever more deeply into these spiritual realities, in company with our Lady, for the salvation of our soul and the souls of others. Let's never take it for granted! God bless you.