

Fourteenth Week of Ordinary Time
July 7, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #28

*“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that vivifies; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I to you, that no man can come to me, except it were given to him of my Father.’ **From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus to the twelve, ‘Will you also go away?’** Then Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ He spoke of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.” (John 6:60-71 American KJV)*

Last weekend I asked you to read the sixth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel paying special attention to the reaction of the disciples. Refreshing our memory, the disciples and other listeners are fighting amongst themselves. Jesus has informed them that they must eat His Flesh and drink His Blood to have life. This statement contradicts their teachings found in Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. His use of very specific language leads many to consider His desire is for His followers to turn to cannibalism. I asked you to consider this question: As many of His disciples are walking away, repulsed and disgusted, would that not have been the appropriate time to call them back and instruct them concerning His true intention? Did He mean for them to have a literal interpretation of His words or were His words meant to only be held symbolically?

I propose to you, the answer to this dilemma is actually answered by Jesus, Himself. Saint John records that as they walked away, Jesus turns to those twelve, His innermost companions, and asked: “Do you also want to leave?”

My dear family, consider the impact of this moment and that question. Saint John uses a word equivalent to our English word “many.” A religious teacher might spend hours, days, months or years gathering a hardy number of disciples. All this time and effort of gathering is walking away from Jesus. Those who could be used to carry His message to all parts of the known world are walking away and He lets them. Added to the gravity of this moment, He is willing to have those closest to Him leave as well. He does not try to convince or coerce any to believe what He is saying. He presents it as a stipulation of belief in Him as the One sent by God. He does not correct their interpretation, nor does He offer a “symbolic” answer. He does not even explain how the eating and drinking of His Flesh and Blood will be made possible. He only presents it as a simple truth His followers must be willing to accept.

My family, Jesus allowed those disciples to walk away that day without calling them back. Honestly, He has allowed men and women for the last 2,000 years of our Christian history

to walk away. We, desperate to remain a “follower,” purposely change His words and the requirements necessary to be His disciple. We are the ones who change God to comply with us, rather than our changing to comply with Him. The great Saint Jerome once said, “The truth He spoke to them was hard to hear, as it always has been and always will be.”

I offer something for you to reflect upon for next week and the following weeks thereafter. Saint Paul was the first apostle to write his letters to the communities prior to 60AD. Added with this, Saint John wrote his Gospel between 80-100AD. As we move forward into the life and beliefs of the first Christians, ask yourself, **IF** there was a misunderstanding that day and Jesus only meant for His disciples to take His words as being “symbolic,” **THEN** would not either Saint Paul or Saint John have corrected this error through their writings and teachings?