

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembere

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B – August 20, 2021

Over the past several weeks I've have had the privilege of reading [John 6](#) 'The Bread of Life Discourse'.

Recall that Jesus had talked about Himself as "*The Bread of Life.*" *The bread that came down "Unless you eat my body and drink my blood you would not have life in you. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."*

For a first century Jew, eating an animal with its blood in it was not only disgusting, repugnant to the extreme, it was immoral and forbidden in many parts of the Old Testament, because blood symbolized life.

Today we hear that many of Jesus's disciples are leaving him because of this teaching. "*This saying is hard. Who can accept it?*" Many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him; they left him. This is what we hear in the Gospel.

Mind you these are not neutral followers, real followers, not the Apostles, real followers who had watched Him perform miracles, heard His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount.

I am the Bread of Life. I am bread that came down from heaven Unless you eat my body and drink my blood you would not have life in you. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. This is where the Church gets its teaching on The Real Presence. Sixth chapter of John.

Jesus then said to the twelve "*Do you also want to leave?*" Scholars say this is one of the saddest moments in Scripture.

It raises the important question for us today. Are you with Christ or not? Do you accept the teaching of the Real Presence or not? My advice for all of us is to stay with the Eucharistic Jesus.

Notice that first of all, Jesus does not back down in any way from His beautiful and very deep teaching on the Holy Eucharist. What He said He stands behind, namely, that "*unless you eat the flesh*

of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53). He goes on to say, "For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink" (John 6:55).

From there, Jesus turns to His disciples and gives them the freedom to accept or reject what He just taught. This freedom He gives to them is essential to them entering into authentic faith. If Jesus would have pressured or manipulated the disciples, it would have been hard for them to freely choose to accept Him and all He taught.

The same is true with us. Jesus does not require us to follow Him. He will not force or manipulate us into believing. He will not pressure us. Rather, Jesus offers Himself and His teachings and invites us to believe.

- How are you using free will and freedom that God has given you?

We have two people who choose right. Their choices were outstanding. They chose to stay with the Eucharistic Jesus.

Peter spoke on behalf of the twelve - chose to follow Christ "*Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal Life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy one of God.*"

- Nothing was better than staying with Jesus. That is how I have felt from the day I became a priest...expressed in the words I had on my prayer card: "*There is one thing I ask of the Lord; this do I seek, to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to savor the sweetness of the Lord, to behold His Temple.*"

In our first reading Joshua put a choice before the people, just after they had entered the promised land; to serve the false gods, or the true God Yahweh who brought them out of land of slavery.

Joshua himself chose to serve Yahweh in his words, "*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*"

He did not impose his choice on the people; they had to make their choice their own choice. And they chose Yahweh.

God has given us the freedom to choose; He wants us to choose to stay with him.

As we come forward to receive Jesus; ask Jesus to stay with us. Padre Pio has a very powerful prayer: *Jesus, Stay with Us.*