

For the past couple of weeks, we have been hearing from Jesus' bread of life discourse which began with the multiplication of loaves and fishes. In today's gospel, the Jews are having a problem accepting Jesus' teaching because of who they think he is. Their knowledge of Jesus and his family poses an obstacle to their faith. Before I go on, I need to remind us all that faith is what is called a theological virtue, meaning that it comes from God alone. We cannot get faith on our own. It must come from God. This doesn't really mean that God withholds faith from some people; we can't use that as an excuse. Remember the parable of the sower, the farmer who goes out and scatters seeds all over the place and the type of soil they fall in determines how the seeds grow. God is the sower and he is scattering the seeds of faith all over the place—this should tell us that God plants the seeds of faith in everybody, nobody is beyond his reach. God plants the seeds but we have a responsibility to help them grow. We must cooperate with the graces that God gives to us. God gives us faith; we have to help it grow.

What often happens though, even for people with incredibly strong faith, is that we run up against an obstacle to our faith, just like the Jews did in today's gospel. That obstacle will be some sort of cliff or chasm that we have to climb or leap over in to move forward. In order to grow in our faith, we may very well find ourselves in the same position as Indiana Jones: faced with a leap of faith from the lion's head.

If you have seen Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, you know the scene I'm talking about. For those of you who don't--this movie is about the search for the Holy Grail--the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper and--according to legend--the chalice that caught the blood that came out of Jesus' side at the crucifixion. Whoever drinks from this chalice will have eternal life. In the movie, the Nazis want the grail and Indiana Jones, his father, and two of their friends are trying to stop the Nazis from getting it. In the climax of the movie, one of the bad guys shoots Indy's dad to force Indy to retrieve the grail. The grail is the only thing that can save his father. To get to the grail, Indy has to face three deadly trials and the only thing he has to help him are three riddles, one for each trial. The final challenge is based on faith and it comes with the riddle; "Only in the leap from the lion's head will you prove your worth." He makes it through the first two trials and finds himself standing underneath the head of a stone lion at the edge of a high cliff. He can see the entrance to the chamber that houses the grail on the other side of the chasm. It appears that the only way across is to jump. Which is impossible.

A superhero might be able to do it, but not Indiana Jones. But the riddle tells him he has to. So he sticks his foot out and steps forward into thin air. You have to watch the movie to find out what happens next.

At some point in our faith journey, we all have to do this. We all have to get across a chasm. We all have to make a leap of faith. This is the situation that we find in today's gospel. The Jews are murmuring against Jesus because they can't make a leap of faith, they can't get across that chasm. They think they know who Jesus is. They know his family. They know Mary and Joseph. They are willing to accept him as a political messiah, someone who is going to help them get rid of the Romans, but the bread of life sent down from heaven? What does that even mean? Jesus doesn't back down. Instead, he raises the stakes and tells the Jews that if they want eternal life, they have to eat this bread from heaven...which is himself. And in case there is any confusion, later on, he's very clear about what he means: "my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." Then, as we will hear in two weeks, there comes a breaking point: this teaching is too hard for many of the disciples to accept and they leave him.

The people in the crowd had to make two different leaps of faith, way bigger than anything Indian Jones had to leap over. For the Jews, Jesus is speaking blasphemy. In saying that he was sent from heaven, he is identifying himself very closely to God. He doesn't come right out and directly say "I am God's son, which makes me divine too," but he's walking a very dangerous line. And then by implying that they have to eat his flesh (the bread from heaven), they think that he's telling them that they have to participate in human sacrifice. Human sacrifice was something that their enemies did and this was strictly forbidden. It was abhorrent to faithful Jews trying to live according to the Law of Moses. Jesus was asking them to make a leap of faith that many of them weren't prepared to make.

Going back to the movie, right after the bad guy shoots Indy's dad he tells Indy, "It's time to ask yourself, what do you believe?" This is the question that Jesus is forcing the Jews to ask themselves. It is also the question that we have to ask ourselves. Everytime we come forward to receive Communion we should ask ourselves that question, "What do I believe?" The church teaches us that at the consecration, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit who transforms the bread and wine on the altar into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained in the Eucharistic species. That is straight out of the Catechism paragraph 1374. Do we understand

this sacrifice in the same way the ancient Jews did? No. In the gospel the Jews believed that Jesus was telling them they have to eat a piece of his body, or something like that. This is not what the church teaches. The technical term is transubstantiation. There is a change of substance. Whatever it is that makes the bread bread and the wine wine, has miraculously transformed into the substance of Jesus Christ. It looks, tastes, and smells like bread and wine but its inner reality has become Jesus. We can try to understand it rationally, through our intellect, up here in our heads. But we really can't understand it in our heads, we can only really "understand" it in our hearts. This requires prayer. In the end, it requires a leap of faith.

The best way we can prepare ourselves to make that leap of faith in regards to the Eucharist is by praying before the Eucharistic Face of Jesus in Adoration. When we come into a church or a chapel in which the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar we are face to face and heart to heart with Jesus. We are looking at him and he is looking back at us. You don't even have to say anything; in fact sometimes it's better if you don't. Let your heart speak to his heart and listen as his heart speaks to yours. He wants us to come and visit him as often as we possibly can. We have an adoration chapel here and it's available all the time; all you have to do is get the code from the office. If you do visit the chapel just remember that you are in the presence of Jesus so be reverent and prayerful. If you are the last one to leave the chapel make sure to shut the doors of the tabernacle before you leave and make sure the doors to the chapel are shut and locked securely. If you cannot come to the chapel, imagine yourself in one of the hundreds of chapels or churches around the world where Jesus sits alone in the tabernacle with no one to adore him.

I invite all of us to spend some time in prayer today, in front of the Blessed Sacrament if possible, reflecting on this section of John's Gospel. If you can, read the section of the Catechism that speaks about the Eucharist or read what some of the saints have written about the bread of life. And then ask yourselves one more time, "What do I believe?"