

20<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Joshua 24:1-2,15-18; Psalm 33(34):2-3,16-23; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6: 60-69

### **Lord, who shall we go to?**

The gospel reading today concludes the long gospel discourse of chapter 6 in the gospel according to John. In the earlier parts of this discourse Jesus had claimed to be the true bread come from heaven and had invited his disciples to 'eat his flesh and drink his blood.' In the gospel according to John this discourse has two important interpretations, and I will suggest reading it in yet another context.

For us today, reading the gospel according to John after two thousand years of living and celebrating the true flesh and blood of Jesus that we receive under the form of bread and wine, we see here a very clear discourse about the Eucharist. The Eucharist is indeed the true bread come down from heaven, as Jesus is the Son of God; it is the flesh and blood of Jesus given to us to eat and drink; and it is also a source by which we receive the Holy Spirit of God.

At another level, Jesus is inviting his disciples and us to engage with this word of God, bread come down from heaven. The symbolism of eating and drinking is an image of making our own what is being offered to us! As the Word of God made flesh, Jesus is indeed the true bread from heaven; while the earthly manna functioned on an earthly level but could not give eternal life, the living bread from heaven that is Jesus himself, carries within it the very life of God and is a source of eternal life. Jesus is encouraging his disciples to listen to his word, because it is the word of God himself, and to have faith in him. Only this way they can have the life of God within them – eternal life.

The gospel writer wants us to understand both these levels of reading the gospel discussion as they are related and feed into each other. We need to engage in – eat and drink – the word of God and have faith in Jesus in order to be able to participate in the Eucharist, the true flesh and blood of Jesus!

Some disciples protest; they cannot understand how Jesus can say that he is bread from heaven! They see him as one of them but struggle to understand the mystery of the incarnation: word made flesh. So they refuse to listen to him and to participate in the life he brings. Jesus then turns to the Twelve and asks: do you want to leave also? Peter makes his declaration of faith: to whom shall we go? You are the one who can really feed us!

At this stage I ask your indulgence. Allow me to take this text totally out of its original context and apply it to our own present situation. We, together with many of our sisters and brothers, have been following Jesus, eating and drinking his flesh and blood, believing in his word. We cannot understand how some among us, some of our leaders, instead of being Christ-like, have instead abused a large number of the faithful, and they seem to have gone away with it! We simply cannot understand how the leaders of this Body of Christ did not speak out to defend vulnerable members and have instead protected perpetrators. Many of our sisters and brothers have left in disbelief and in anger.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: what are we going to do? Do we also leave? I think Peter's response is very helpful for us: Lord to whom shall we go? You are the one who gives us life! Our promise is to eat and drink of the flesh and blood of Jesus. We are Church because we believe and we want to participate in this deep reality. At its roots the Church is the gathering together of all of us who believe and who together share God's word and the Eucharist. Like us, the Church as an institution, is a sinful Church; it is a Church on the way to holiness. I encourage us to follow Peter and root our faith deeply in Jesus. We know that he is the true bread come down from heaven. The sins and the sinners around us do not take anything away from Jesus as Son and Word of God. The invitation is still for us to eat and drink, to engage in faith, to believe and join other faithful believers in following Jesus.