

To Whom Can We Go?

August 22, 2021, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel of John 6:53, 60-69

Fr. Brad

Have you taken time to think through the reasons you come to church on Sunday - - or more broadly, why you practice your CATHOLIC FAITH and continue to receive the sacraments? Given that so many have been away for so long because of Covid, many people are asking themselves, 'Why would I bother to come back?'

Just about all of us, particularly the 'cradle Catholics', would have to say that they inherited their faith tradition and practice from their parents, their Church, and their teachers at school. As children, we did what we were told and imitated our parents and teachers because we were told it was the right thing to do. When you think about it, it's really a second hand faith, passed on without consultation.

How many of you who have been baptised were consulted first? Certainly it was only the ones who were of a more mature age who would have been able to give any kind of informed consent.

For the rest, it was a given thing. As a result, **we eventually** come to a crossroads and **have to decide on a few things. Do we take the next step and make this faith our own**, or do we eventually say no, it's not for me, or do we perhaps just gradually drift away from it. If my faith were to remain at this second hand level, I might well question why I would bother continuing to nurture and practice my Catholic Christian faith given all the controversy, confusion, and mixed information.

Perhaps we do see our inherited faith tradition/practice as a gift, given to help us along the way. But what then are we doing with the gift? Has it challenged us to a deeper commitment? Am I truly prepared to live by it and grow in it? This is the crux of the messages in our first reading and Gospel today. Both present the question, '**Who are you committed to and whose ways will you follow?**'

In the first reading, Joshua and company are in the Promised Land and he calls the people together. They have trusted, they have followed, and they have endured up until that point. Now, what are they going to do from here on in?...will they say, 'we have arrived, let's put our feet up and live off the plentiful but temporary sustenance they have found in the new land after years in the desert,' or will they remember the faith of their ancestors, the faith that got them where they are now and continue to trust God to lead them. Joshua says, '**As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.**' The passage ends by the listeners agreeing they would now face the future based on God's goodness to them.

In the Gospel, Jesus recognizes the difficulty with which his message is being received - - **the Bread of Life offering his flesh as food, without which there is no life.** 'Who can accept this?' they murmur.

Jesus says, '*Does this offend you?*' Many of those who had become followers were now beginning to drop off and Jesus turns to his immediate followers, the twelve, and asks, "**Do you also wish to go away?**"

This is the **challenging message** of today's Gospel **for us** today. Undoubtedly, today's uncertainties during pandemic, (*if and/or when to get vaccinated and by what vaccine and how many times and how far apart, how important is it going to church if we have not felt safe due to Covid, etc.*) There is also the history of sexual abuse in the church, the residential school crisis, abuse of the environment, and the resulting extreme weather - - uncertainties about so many things. Where do we go to find our way forward faithfully?

How do I see my faith in God and how deeply have I truly committed myself to following the ways of Jesus? The problems of the world and problems within the institutional church can easily tempt us to throw in the towel in utter confusion. Those hurt by the institutional church feel they have nowhere to turn because trust has been broken. Who can blame them? But as Jesus says, '***The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.***' How do we stay true to these words?

It is not enough to be handed a faith and a practice based on someone else's interpretation of Jesus' words. A second hand faith is an impoverished faith and is not enough to see us through all the hardships of life. Only by our open hearts and the grace of God are we able to move toward a deeper recognition of who Christ truly is for each of us as expressed by Peter, '*To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*' How personal and vulnerable is that?

Peter realized that for better or for worse there was nowhere else to go, no one else to follow, anything else would be backwards and empty. The old ways did not work anymore. Still, there was much trepidation because they did not fully understand Jesus' teaching and what the future held. Similarly for us today, many of our old ways are not enough anymore. Our faith in Christ needs to be much deeper than the conveniences and external practices we learned as children. **Are we making our faith our own? Our commitment to our faith and our presence here today is an ACT OF FAITH.** Our reception of the sacrament is an assertion of that commitment to carry the life of Christ within us.

May each one of us accept the challenge presented to us today as followers of Christ - - to **deepen our faith commitment** in spite of the trepidation it brings and the accompanying struggles in an uncertain and confusing world. Amen.