

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time B
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Perhaps it is the most difficult phrase in the Gospel, that very direct question: 'Do you also want to go? It is very confrontational, Jesus in the flesh, the one who calls himself God's food for man, who says he has gone out from God in order to return to Him - do these words annoy you? 'This language offends someone', say his own disciples. Who is still able to listen to Him?

'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever', is the short content of the above. That very explicit, that very physical, that is what meets with resistance. Jesus forces his audience uncompromisingly to accept that you have to become completely one with him in a mystical rather than physical unity. You have to accept that he manifests himself as God who wants to give life; only when you agree to this will you be given a part of his life.

'The flesh does not make alive, it is the Spirit that does. What I have said is Spirit, and life. But there are some among you who do not trust Me.' Later He says that His kingdom is not of this world. The reality He stands for is not earthly, material, geared to possessions or wealth. Or honour. That makes it all so difficult to accept: what are you surrendering to if you go along with this? What kind of life is that which He gives?

There are a few conditions to be able to go along with Jesus' proclamation and to remain faithful to it, to continue to believe in it. It starts with accepting that God is timeless, that He is above time. And then accepting that out of his timelessness he appears in our time, in our human existence. And then accepting that He makes your life better, bigger, stronger and even timeless in the end. It is believing in eternal life, what Jesus calls for, letting yourself be lifted up out of human relativity and receiving food, energy, strength to cope with life or better still: to be able to live life to the full, whatever happens, towards God, towards eternal security, towards perfection. Nothing will fail you anymore, everything has been fulfilled. You in God and God in you, all in all. This language offends us, and that is quite conceivable. It seems like a fantasist who is speaking. Look at the world today: tensions, calamities, one problem after another - and we are lifted above them? You would like that, but it does not work like that.

We are put on the block. Choosing God, believing in Jesus - what makes your life meaningful? Do you believe in the presence of God himself in the signs of bread and wine, the presence of him in the midst of those who know they are invited to his table? Whoever participates in the sacred secrets here is not sure of happiness, of a good life. You can trust that God will make Himself felt in your life, but then you will have to continue to choose Him, to live with Him - whatever that may mean. You have to work at it, grow towards it, and through good and evil see the community arise around Jesus, through Him who is and who was and who is to come, even if so many people run away from it.

Women, be submissive to your husbands. This is the kind of language that disgusts us. But here too, look at what is meant. It begins with 'be submissive to one another out of awe of Christ'. Further on, it is also about reciprocity: men, love your wives, and the meaning that Jesus gives to that is also: submission, adaptation. Paul uses the mutual loyalty of husband and wife as an image of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Church, the community of his love.

When the Jewish people reached the Promised Land, they had to choose: do we live with all the gods they keep here, or do we choose our own, one God, the Holy One of Israel? At that stage of their history they said, 'we are not thinking of leaving the Lord'. The disciples realise: to whom else would they go? His words are words of eternal life and they believe and know that Je-sus is the Holy One of God. If you say that with them, 'I will not think of leaving the Lord', then you may well experience that God accompanies us in all that we experience and have to endure. That He truly feeds us with the person of Jesus. Who could turn that down?