

## "The Turning Point"

### Texts:

Ephesians 6:10-20 (Series B. 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. (Psalm 84)

Gospel Lesson: John 6:56-69

Let us Pray:

O God, light the minds that know you, life of the souls that love you, and strength of the thoughts that seek you - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath into us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

Today's gospel reading concludes our series of readings from the sixth chapter of the gospel according to John. It marks a *turning point* in the response of the people to Jesus, it marks the *point* where most of the people who come out to see Him turn away from him, the *point* where even most his disciples abandon him.

Up to this point Jesus has been the hero of Galilee - the star from Bethlehem the miracle worker who saved a *wedding* by turning water into wine, the healer who gave health the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, the wise man who is able to see into a woman's heart and bring her new hope, the man that is able to feed over 5000 men, women and children with only five loaves of bread and two fish.

But now - after telling the people that all he has done is but a sign from God that they should believe in God through him, - now, after telling them that the *bread and fish* that he gave them to eat only will only satisfy them for a day, but that his flesh and blood will satisfy them forever, that he is the *bread of heaven* God has prepared for them, they leave him.

And as they left, and abandoned the one who gave them bread to eat the one who healed their sick and showed them the power of God - they said to one another and to themselves: *This teaching is too difficult - who can accept it?* Indeed, this teaching that Jesus is the *bread of heaven* and that through him comes eternal life for all who believe in him, all who follow him.

But is this the reason that crowds and most of his disciples leave him? Or is as Jesus said, in verse 26, after they had all followed him across the lake to Capernaum? *"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs and wonders, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."*

God is extraordinarily gracious and kind. God created us in his own image and bestowed this world upon us to care for and to cherish to enjoy. God is good .... How God works is absolutely marvellous. God makes his sun rise on both evil and the good,

God sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous, God cares for all that has made and gives everyone every chance that they need to get things right. In return all God hopes is that we in fact do come to love Him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength and all our minds -- and to love our brothers and our sisters as we love ourselves.

Indeed. God gives - freely - liberally - and without asking much at all of us; only that we accept his gifts and try to follow in the path that he will show us. It is not much to ask is it? Especially it is not much to ask, is it, when you consider what it is that God freely offers us? and what it is that the other side, the dark side, offers us -- when you consider the question of Peter in today's gospel reading, *"to whom else can we go?"*.

I think we know that there is earthly food - which never completely satisfies and that there is heavenly food that endures forever. And I think we want this heavenly food... but, sadly, all too often our want lacks something, all too often it lacks *passion*, and *conviction*, and *will power*.

The reason for this - on the one hand - we are too often not hungry enough, we haven't been really tested and tried and discovered that there is no answer within us or within our human wisdom and our human institutions; and – too often it turns out that all we really want is a free lunch - a material lunch - bread and wine for today - good times without cost -and yes- if we can get it for the asking - we'll take that thing called eternal life as well.

And this is a problem - a problem for those in the world - for those who think in worldly terms, and for many who are "believers" - the kind of believers who believe with their minds, but not with their hearts - those kind of people for whom faith is "three impossible things before breakfast" instead of a life of trust - a life lived in relationship with a real and personal God.

Too often we find people who have the words of faith well planted in the brains - but no conviction, no passion, no commitment in their hearts. They have the outward form of faith, but none of the substance - none of the power.

Christ had an *All or Nothing Message* - A message about receiving life - or not receiving life through him; A message about commitment - the kind of commitment that does not *compromise*, but holds true for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...

Some might say at this point - this is not fair; this is not good news. But think on it for a minute. There are *absolutes in life* - electrons have either a positive spin or a *negative spin* circuits are either open or closed there is either *light* or no light statements are either true or false.

We are not called to be a people who follow Jesus only when it suits their taste, their understanding, or their desires. St. Augustine once said: *"If we pick and choose what to believe in the Scriptures it is not the Bible we believe but ourselves."*

We are called to be with the Lord and to serve him - and to be blessed by him - in good times and hard times - in the times that are easy - and the times when it is not easy.

There is no respect ever shown in the scriptures for people who - when things aren't going in a way that suits them pack their marbles and go home - as did those in today's gospel reading.

In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John we see people who leave Jesus because they wanted free food - a free lunch - and not some vague sounding spiritual food that would do nothing for their hungry guts.

Others leave Jesus - because they can not believe that God would send spiritual food through a person as plain as Jesus - through someone they knew and had grown up with.

To them - the spiritual could not be contained in *the profane* - in the *common* - in *the familiar* - but must always be accompanied by smoke and fire and lightening and thunder and other grand displays.

Still others left Jesus because they understood exactly what he was saying and they did not want God to get that close to them. They wanted to run their own lives -- rather than let God live and work through them. Like so many today - they did not want to give control of their lives over to God.

At times we who called ourselves Christians are present only in body to him - but not in Spirit. Are we committed to God - or do other concerns take up most of our time and energy?

This piece of the paschal mystery is so difficult to comprehend that many of those who were following Jesus in his time walked away because of it. Yet many stayed and struggled and today we each reconcile ourselves to this idea in various ways.

Jesus asks us for a commitment; He asks us to be faithful to him as he is faithful to us - in the good times of our lives - as well as in the bad. In his asking Jesus does not compromise. He does not water down his message so that it will be easier for us.

He does not go chasing after the people who walk away from him as did the crowd at Capernaum. He does not change the truth so that his disciples will not leave him.

He comes to offer to us, as God has always offered us – in Bread and Wine known as Eucharist. Bread been called the "Staff of Life" as a staple food for most of the people in the world and would have been understood in Jesus' time that it was basic to everyday life.

The graphic language is what is most mystifying but hearing it in plain and simple terms, when we consume the bread and the water, they are *in* us, feeding our bodies. Here is a song I learned in 1972 from a Dominican Priest, written by a Roman Catholic priest James Teim in 1942.

**R- Sons of God: Hear His Holy word, Gather around the table of the Lord  
Eat His Body, drink His Blood. And we'll sing a song of love  
Allelu, allelu, allelu, alleluia.**

When we consume the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ - it represents Christ within us as he tells us we are in him, it is *not* just symbolic. It is our spiritual sustenance to nourish us on our earthly journey, our pilgrimage, that culminates in eternal life through salvation.

Consuming the small piece of sacred bread and wine in the Eucharist, is, for me personally, a literal physical connection to an abiding spiritual Presence. Peter discovered it, he discovered the truth when he said: *"Lord, 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."*

The choice to live with Jesus Christ - in his care and under his love.... is ours to make or to live without him and without the peace, the joy, and the strength that a relationship with him offers, is also ours to make.

*Happy are the people whose strength is in you! Whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way...No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who walk with integrity. O Lord of Hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you. Amen.*

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