

21st Sunday 2018

“Do you also want to leave too?”

We are told that MANY disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Jesus.

What’s going on here? Why were many of Jesus’ disciples abandoning him and his mission?

They left him because they find his teaching too hard to accept. This refers to his teaching about eating his body and drinking his blood.

They were shocked when he said this. They must have thought that he had gone off the deep end. What is he saying? How can we eat his body and drink his blood? Why would we do that? Isn’t that cannibalism? This doesn’t make any sense. The idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood was abhorrent to them and so they abandoned him.

I wonder how Jesus felt. What was his reaction?

I’m sure that the departure of so many followers bothered him. Certainly, even hurt his feelings. But he didn’t back down. He didn’t take his words back. He didn’t soften his words. He didn’t say, “I only mean this symbolically.”

Instead he challenged their faith in him and told them that “the words I have spoken are spirit and life” and belief in him and his words are granted by his Father.

He let them go.

We can’t blame his disciples for being shocked by Jesus’ words. After all, the invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood is abhorrent to us too. At least without the context of the Eucharist and an understanding of what happens at Mass.

Jesus did literally give us his flesh and blood to eat and drink. He offered his life for us on the wood of the cross and every time we celebrate the Eucharist and remember his sacrifice and share the consecrated bread and wine we do eat his body and drink his blood, albeit in a sacramental way.

We are told by those who study such things that many Catholics today no longer go to Mass regularly and many Catholics no longer believe in the real presence of Christ.

Have they also turned away from Christ because they find his teaching shocking? Maybe. Another possibility is that they find his teaching irrelevant for their lives.

Either way, we have a big job in front of us. We have to find ways of evangelizing and teaching our Catholic beliefs.

Simon Peter had it right. When Jesus asked “Do you want to leave?” he responded “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Son of God.”

Those of us who are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and that he has the words of eternal life, will not leave. We will stay, no matter what.

To quote the prophet Joshua in our first reading: “As for me and my household we will serve the Lord.”

The Catholic Church has once again been shaken by revelations of terrible crimes against children and, even worse, shocking revelations that bishops have covered up these crimes.

Many Catholics have left the Church or are tempted to leave the Church. This is understandable. Many of us are enraged by what we heard from the reports coming out of PA and especially the disturbing reports about former Cardinal McCormick. You and I have a right to be enraged, shocked, disheartened, and betrayed.

Perhaps some will deal with these revelations by leaving the Church. But I hope and pray that we will not. If we are convinced like Simon Peter was that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that HE has the words of everlasting life, then we will stay. We will acknowledge that we have a great deal of work to do to cleanse the Church we love of all that is sinful and evil. We will pray for healing and work for justice for the victims. We will recognize that the Church is divine because its foundation is Christ, but it is also human because of its members, some of whom have sinned and have betrayed Christ.

In the second reading for today, St. Paul proclaims that:

Christ loved the church
and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,
cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,
that he might present to himself the church in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.

Let these words sink into to our consciousness. Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her.

I believe this is the time not to leave the Church but to stay within it and help to cleanse it and purify it as Jesus did.

Yes the Church has spots and terrible wrinkles. This has become so evident. But that is not the entirety of the Church. We who love Christ and the Church he founded are called to make the Church the beautiful, spotless, and pure bride of Christ that God intended.

We need to pray for the Church and we must also challenge the Church and its leaders to take the action needed to uproot the evil and sin in the Church and to make it holy and pure so that it can be the means of salvation that Christ intended it to be.