

## To whom shall we go? (from the Pastor)

This week, as we bring the month of August to a close, we also wrap up at Mass the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John's Gospel, the long discourse on the Bread of Life, where we hear in Jesus' own words what the Eucharist means and why it matters in our lives. Once again, I encourage you to read that whole chapter in your family Bible and pray about it sometime before Labor Day. (If you don't have a family Bible, you can purchase them inexpensively at any Catholic bookstore, such as Inner Visions, or online).

The Scripture readings today are very powerful ones, all about what our relationship to the Lord should be. In the Old Testament Book of Joshua, we see the man whom the Lord appointed as successor to Moses to complete the task of leading His people into the Promised Land, literally poised on the brink. In His dramatic "pep rally," Joshua reminds the people of the mighty deeds of the Lord, especially His freeing them from terrible slavery in Egypt, and then tells the people that they will have to make a stark choice. For as they enter into the Promised Land, they will be surrounded by people who worship false gods and it will be very, very tempting to do the same. So Joshua reminds the people that they *must* choose whether they will worship the true God as His disciples, or instead turn to the same false Gods their neighbors do. The right choice? "As for me and my household, I will serve the Lord (the one true God).

This is very significant, because nearly the same thing happens in the Gospel: Jesus is reminding the people of the tremendous things He will do for them. In sharing His own Body and Blood, the astonishing gift of the Bread of Life, He will let all who believe in Him and worthily eat His flesh and drink His blood share in the power and joy of the Resurrection. The Lord comes not just to free them from earthly slavery, but to set them free from the power of sin and death which brings darkness and despair. But this seems too new, too mysterious, too radical to most of his hearers. They are just not comfortable in believing this amazingly Good News because it doesn't fit their pre-conceived expectations, and is "not what their neighbors think." So they murmur and complain and just walk away from the Lord, saying "This saying (Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist) is just too hard to believe."

Jesus lets them walk away, because He always allows us, in love, the freedom to choose whether to believe in Him as the Son of God. So He challenges Peter and the disciples to choose to believe and serve Him as Lord. "Do you, too, want to walk away." St. Peter's response is instructive. "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." In other words, because He knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and only reveals the truth, as hard as it is to believe, Peter trusts that what Jesus says must be true. His relationship with the Lord won't allow otherwise. Then He says something else very significant. "We have come to believe and now know that you are the Holy One of God." What's key about this? Peter professes that His trust and belief comes *first*, and *then* comes the knowledge that Jesus in the Eucharist is truly God. Sometimes we are tempted to fall into the trap of going the other way: "Unless I can figure it out according to the 'ordinary rules' of the way things work, then I won't believe in the Eucharist. I'll only believe it if I can see some scientific proof." But that is not the way it works. We have to believe in the testimony of Jesus first, and *then* come to know Him in the breaking of the Bread.

It is not that the faith is irrational or superstitious, but there are some things that we can't understand by our human reason alone. We have to follow our reason as far as it goes and

then ask Jesus for the gift of faith to take us the rest of the way. If we do that, then we can allow ourselves to surrender to the Love of God – Who, as He promises us, is truly present in the Eucharist.

But there is a warning here: If we do that – dive into the mystery of the Eucharist and truly believe the Lord's words – that will set us apart. Just like the Israelites whom Joshua led into the Promised Land. We *will* be different than most of our neighbors, coworkers – even many family members – who don't follow Jesus' astonishing teaching where it leads: right to the Heavenly life of the Trinity. But that just shouldn't stop us. As for us, and our parish, we will serve the Lord and believe in the Holy Eucharist and the Bread of Life!