

21st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. John 6:60-69

If you pay attention to this Gospel it has among the most important verses of the whole Bible. But it is not what is said, but what is not said. And there is nothing said. For the past two weeks the Gospel has been part of what is called the “bread of life discourse” which followed on from the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves of bread. This discourse is the teaching of Our Lord on the meaning of the Sacrament of the Eucharist and His real presence—Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Blessed Sacrament. In this Gospel He draws this to a close and says clearly that what He teaches is the truth, and the fullness of the truth. That in Him, Jesus Christ, lies life. And it is now, as St. John writes, that “many of His disciples left Him” (*Jn. 6:66*).

Since that day 2,000 years ago and through the centuries that followed and even today, there are those who have left Our Lord. Not so much that they didn't like what He said, but more that they didn't like what it demanded of them.

2,000 years ago, as “many of His disciples left Him” (*Jn. 6:66*), Our Lord did not change what He had taught to win them back. He did not try to soften His approach. He did not compromise with the truth. And we know this not by what He said, but by what He did not say.

Today there are many who try to change the Gospel, to soften it, to make it better suit themselves and their worldview. The gospel of the modern world says, “follow your heart.” But Our Lord never said “follow your heart”, instead He said it is “from the human heart, that evil intentions come... and they defile a person” (*Mk. 7:21, 23*). The world says, “be true to yourself,” but Our Lord never said that. He said, “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (*Mt. 16:24*). The world tells us

to “believe in ourselves,” but Our Lord said, “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (*Jn. 11:25-26*). We are told to “live our truth.” Our Lord never said that. He said to believe in Him is to “know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (*Jn. 8:32*). And, of course, we are taught that as long as we are happy that is all that matters. But Our Lord said, “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?” (*Mt. 16:25-26*).

The 17th century French mathematician and physician, Blaise Pascal, wrote of a God-shaped hole in the every human heart. In other words, every man and woman has a longing which they need to fulfill. Our world tells us to fill that hole with wealth, with lust, with power, with control, with defining our own identities, but these are all like trying to place a square peg in a round hole—they will never fit and there will always be an emptiness. The only thing that can fill a God-shaped hole is God Himself.

We will never find the peace we desire, the joy we long for, the fulfilment of our desires until we start to ask not less of ourselves, but more. The fullness of who we are doesn't lie in compromises with the truth, with trying to figure out the loopholes. If we say on the one hand that we believe this or that is true, but on the other hand claim it doesn't always mean we have to follow that truth then we really never believed it at all. Some will make an excuse and say God doesn't really care that much about this, He understands. Well I hope God cares a lot more than that because otherwise we are all in trouble.

The reality is that the Catholic faith is the only thing in the world that provides moral guideposts which are anchored to something foundational and unchanging. But when we compromise with the faith we end up flapping in the wind, changing direction this way and that to suit whatever the latest identity politics and ideology it was that made the news that day, and all because we fall for their lie that it will all be better this way.

This life is too much trouble, far too strange, to arrive at the end of it and then be asked what you made of it and say “I did it my way.” We were not made for 80 or so years in this world and to grab all the pleasure we can. We are made for eternity and for everlasting joy. Therefore, we should settle for nothing less than the infinite mystery and infinite delight that is God.¹ For that is what St. Peter meant when he said, “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe” (*Jn.* 6:68).

It may not be an easy life, but it is the only life worth living.

¹ Cf. Zahl, D. “Walker Percy Interviews Himself,” in *Mockingbird* (5 April, 2011) (mbird.com/literature/walker-percy-interviews-himself)