

GOSPEL

JOHN 6:60-69

After hearing his doctrine many of the followers of Jesus said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?'

'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.'

'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him.' After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.

Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today the Sixth Chapter of the Gospel of John concludes with the discourse on the Bread of Life, which Jesus gave the day after the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

At the end of that discourse, the great enthusiasm of previous day had dissipated, for Jesus said that he was the Bread which came down from heaven, and that he would give his flesh as food and his blood as drink, thereby clearly alluding to the sacrifice of his life. Those words gave rise to dismay in the people, who deemed such words unworthy of the Messiah, not "winning" words. Thus, several regarded Jesus as a messiah who should have spoken and acted in such a way as to bring success to his mission, straight away. But they were mistaken precisely in this: in the way of understanding the mission of the Messiah! Not even the disciples managed to accept the unsettling words of the Teacher. And today's passage refers to their discomfort: "This is a hard

saying", they commented, "who can listen to it?".

In reality, they had certainly understood Jesus' discourse. So well that they did not want to heed it, because it was a discourse which threw their mind-set into crisis. Jesus' words always throw us into crisis, for example, the worldly spirit, worldliness. But Jesus offers the key for overcoming this difficulty; a key consisting of three elements. First, his *divine origin*: he came down from heaven and will ascend again to "where he was before". Second: his words can be understood only through *the action of the Holy Spirit*. The One who "gives life" is precisely the Holy Spirit who enables us to understand Jesus properly. Third: the true cause of incomprehension of his words is the *lack of faith*: "there are some of you that do not believe", Jesus says. In fact from that time, the Gospel says, "many of his disciples drew back". In the face of these desertions, Jesus does not compromise and does not mince words, indeed he demands that a precise choice be made: either to stay with him or leave him, and he says to the Twelve: "Will you also go away?".

At this point Peter makes his confession of faith on behalf of the other Apostles: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life". He does not say "where shall we go?", but "to whom shall we go?". The underlying problem is not about leaving and abandoning the work undertaken, but *to whom* to go. From Peter's question we understand that fidelity to God is a question of fidelity to a person, to whom we bind ourselves to walk together on the same road. And this person is Jesus. All that we have in the world does not satisfy our infinite hunger. We need Jesus, to be with him, to be nourished at his table, on his words of eternal life! Believing in Jesus means making him the centre, the meaning of our life. Christ is not an optional element: he is the "Living Bread", the essential nourishment. Binding oneself to him, in a true relationship of faith and love, does not mean being tied down, but being profoundly free, always on the journey. Each one of us can ask him- or herself: who is Jesus for me? Is he a name, an

idea, simply an historical figure? Or is he truly that person who loves me and gave his life for me and walks with me? Who is Jesus for you? Are you with Jesus? Do you try to comprehend him in his word? Do you read the Gospel, each day a passage from the Gospel to learn to know Jesus? Do you carry a small Gospel in your pocket, handbag, to read it, in whatever place? Because the more we are with him the more the desire to be with him grows. Now I ask you, please, let us have a moment of silence and let each one of us silently, in our hearts, ask ourselves the question: "Who is Jesus for me?". Silently, each one, answer in your heart.

May the Virgin Mary help us to always "go" to Jesus to experience the freedom he offers us, allowing it to cleanse our choices from worldly incrustations and fears.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- There are many ways to see Jesus: Saviour, Lord, Judge, Friend, Brother, Beloved. Who is Jesus to you? Why?
- What do you think are some of the modern day obstacles to believing that Jesus is who he says he is?
- In sharing Jesus with others, what are some important things we can tell people about him?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.