

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug. 25-26, 2018, Cycle B

We have been contemplating Jesus' "Bread of Life" discourse from the Gospel of John for five weeks now. Five weeks is almost as long as the season of Lent. This weekend we come to the conclusion of the "Bread of Life" discourse, and Jesus issues us a challenge – a challenge to believe that his words are true, that He is the true Bread come down from heaven. And, to believe that his "flesh is true food," and his "blood is true drink." And "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." In short Jesus is the New Manna; and consuming this new manna, Jesus, we will not die, but will live forever.

We see many of Jesus' own disciples walk away from him in the end. They say: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" And the gospel tells us: "Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe..." Jesus is all too familiar with our indecisive, volatile human. He knew quite well that a desire for encounter with God was not foremost in the minds of those who he had just fed with five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The crowd was hoping for more of that miraculous bread to fill their bellies. Follow Jesus? Sure, we'll follow you Jesus, as long as you fill our bellies and buckets with more miracles, so we won't ache from physical hunger anymore. Such is the force of the gravity of our flesh; we find it difficult getting beyond our practical every day material needs.

Jesus is quite aware of our human, physical every day needs; we need food for our bellies, we need a roof over our head, we need clothes for our body, and we moderns might add: oh, while you're at it Lord, air conditioning, indoor plumbing, and a pool in the backyard would be nice too. Nonetheless, Jesus will not excuse us from the challenge he throws out to his followers then, and we his followers now. Jesus challenges us to think beyond food, beyond the practicalities of material life! Jesus says: "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail." Remember? Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, and they still died. Jesus is saying: Don't you get it? You have been born not just for life in this century, but for all eternity.

As we saw, not all could accept Jesus' words. Some just couldn't get beyond the world in front of their eyes. It kind of reminds me of the modern day Christian who asks: why should I go to Mass? What do I get out of it? The Mass doesn't put food on the table, or put money in my pockets. Some others listening to Jesus only heard disturbing gibberish that made no sense. Peter, however! Peter caught a glimpse of the deeper realities Jesus was talking about. "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Peter recognized Jesus' distinction between "flesh" and "spirit." "Flesh" is Simon Peter, left to himself, incapable of discerning the things of God. "Spirit" is the Breath of God in the human being, enriching interior life, in this challenge when many abandon the teacher, Peter opts for Jesus' words of "Spirit and life." An interior life we first breathe in at Baptism and we nourish with the word of God and the Eucharist, the very Body and Blood of the Lord.

The question now is: what about you, what about me? Jesus asks us: "Do you also want to leave?"