

# Commentary on the Gospel: "To whom shall we go?"

Gospel for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

## **Gospel (*Jn* 6:60-69)**

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have

spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that should betray him. And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, “Will you also go away?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

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## **Commentary**

Not all the Evangelists speak about the institution of the Eucharist. Saint John, who dedicates several chapters to the Last Supper, does not mention the words of the institution of this sacrament that lies at the heart of the Church's life. Nevertheless, the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of his Gospel is dedicated almost entirely to the discourse on the bread of life.

In this important discourse, Jesus' mysterious words scandalized his listeners: "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (*Jn* 6:54-55).

The Gospel passage that we read today describes the people's reaction to those words. Many of Jesus' disciples were scandalized, asking themselves how one could eat the flesh of a man and drink his blood. And as a consequence, many stopped

following him and abandoned the calling to accompany the Master.

The problem is even more serious because that criticism doesn't lead to dialogue with Jesus, but is expressed in "mutterings." So the Master intervenes in order to make clear that the Christian life is only possible if one trusts in God: "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

The Christian message, the encounter with Christ, is a source of scandal, a "stumbling block" that breaks down our schemes and plans. The Redemption requires letting ourselves be saved, accepting being part of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church.

And this is centered on the Holy Mass, which Saint Josemaria liked to describe as the "center and root of our interior life."

The greatest thing we can do each day is take part in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On one occasion Pope Francis reminded us that “drawing nourishment from Jesus and living in Him through Eucharistic Communion, if we do so with faith, transforms our life; it transforms it into a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters ... Heaven begins precisely in this communion with Jesus” (Angelus, 16 August 2015).

Finally, Jesus addresses the twelve, asking them: “Will you also go away?” Despite the fact that he already knew who believed and who were non-believers, Jesus questions the Apostles directly about their intentions, challenging their freedom.

We can make Peter’s reply our own: Lord, to whom will we go? How can we fail to follow you? In our relationship with you, especially in

Eucharistic Communion, we find the source of our joy and the reason for our existence.

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