

### **August 23, 2015 The Hard Sayings of Jesus Homily**

The unexpected sharp reply to the murmurings of his disciples in today's gospel reading is enough to unsettle us. "Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this he said to them, does this shock you"? (Jn.6:61) Can the teachings of our Lord ever leave us complacent?

Some years ago, a biblical scholar and Evangelical Protestant, F. F. Bruce, wrote a very informative book on the "hard sayings" of Jesus. So many are the so-called hard sayings of Jesus that the author devoted an entire book to the subject! Let it be noted that it is *not* a slim volume! Our Blessed Lord never ceases to challenge and surprise us with his teachings!

The sixth chapter of John's gospel is a turning point in the life of our Lord. It begins so beautifully: "And a multitude followed him because they saw the signs which he did on those who were sick" (Jn.6:1). It is clear that many people are following Jesus. Yet it ends on a painful note: "Many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him"(Jn.6:66). What happened? Many took offense at the words of Christ. It is the only instance in the gospels where the followers of Jesus abandon him in such large numbers. Let us recall one of the hard sayings of Jesus. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (Jn.6:53) His words provoked an immediate response "This saying is hard .Who can accept it?" (Jn.6:60). This "hard saying" of Jesus resulted in a painful separation.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read the following: "The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples just as the announcement of the passion scandalized them. The Eucharist and the cross are stumbling blocks. It is the same mystery and it never ceases to be an occasion for division" (#1336). As the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen writes in his splendid book, "The life of Jesus": "The announcement of the Eucharist produced one of the greatest crises of his life. His promise to give his body and blood, for the souls of men caused him to lose much that he had gained". "The announcement of the Eucharist cracked his followers wide open".  
What can we learn from today's gospel?

First, Jesus fully respects our freedom. What is particularly striking about today's reading is that Christ does not utter a word of protest following the departure of his one time disciples. He does not pursue them. Surely, he must have been disappointed! He does not allow their departure to undermine his deep seated commitment to preach the good news regardless of how his words will be received.

Second, Jesus shows little concern for public opinion. He refuses to compromise his "hard sayings". He does not soften his words. It is as if he said, "Take it or leave it". As Peter reminds us "You have the words of everlasting life"(Jn.6:68).

Third, are we indifferent to the challenging words of Our Lord? Jesus' discourse in the sixth chapter of John's gospel contains hard sayings that separate believers in Him as the Bread of Life from those who see him as nothing more than the son of Joseph. Do Our Lord's hard sayings put us into or outside his camp?

In preparing this homily, I am painfully aware of the many that have either left the church or who no longer are active in the faith. Surely, they are deserving of our prayers. Nevertheless, we must be resolved to bear witness to our faith and to embrace without protest the "hard sayings" of Jesus!

Amen!