

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We have come to the climax of Jesus' Bread of Life discourse that was met with a bit of grumbling. *"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"*

Jesus doesn't back down; rather He "ups the ante" with His insistence that you've got to eat of the food He gives in order to have life. In fact, He's "all in" for He not only says, *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day,"* but He also says, *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Sounds pretty exclusive—like what Jesus would tell His disciples on the night of His betrayal: *"no one comes to the Father except through me."* This is what caused so much consternation among those who, at least at one time, followed Jesus: *"This is a hard saying,"* they said. *"Who can listen to it?"* So also for many today, this is just too hard a saying. They can't countenance its exclusivity—though raised in a Christian home, famously, Oprah said, *"there couldn't possibly be just one way"* to God. Disciples, ancient and modern, turn their back on Jesus and walk away.

Although earlier it was a larger group of Jews grumbling, it's important to note that Jesus is not just talking to the Pharisees here in our Gospel lesson. We'd surely prefer that, so we could say, *"Oh, shame on you, you unbelieving Pharisees."* But it's not the Pharisees we hear complain about Jesus' teaching. It's His own disciples, not the twelve, to be sure, but others.

How long some of them had been with Jesus, one can't be sure, but surely they had witnessed some of Jesus' miracles — at the very least the feeding of that great crowd of men and women and children with only a couple of small fish and 5 loaves of bread — and this only a day or so before. They might have even seen Jesus' walking on the water to cross the Sea of Galilee. And now it's as if they respond,

*"Jesus, these words of yours, they're too hard to take. We just can't believe them: that you're the bread of life; that **You** came down from heaven, that **You** were sent by God the Father in heaven. We just can't listen to you say things like 'if you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have eternal life.'* How can we do that when Moses taught: *'No one ... shall eat blood. ... I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood. ... Its blood sustains its life.'* (Lev.17) And now **You're** telling us to drink **Your** blood. We'll be cut off. We can't. We won't listen to you any more. We won't listen to you tell us that we can't do the works of God like Moses taught

us, like when our fathers made that covenant with God in the wilderness saying *'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.'* (Ex.24) Now **You're** saying that all we have to do is believe in **You**, and that only if God effects it? That He grants it? That He draws us? No, we can't, we won't listen to you any more."

They took offense. In fact, these disciples were caught in a trap from which they couldn't escape. They were unwilling to listen to Jesus any more. *"What will it take for you to believe?"* asks Jesus. *"How about if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"* *"Would you believe, then?"*

Of course, they don't. We know that just seeing miracles is not sufficient to believe. The answer of the disciples demonstrates this. It goes unspoken, but we later see their response. *"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."* They abandoned Jesus — miracles notwithstanding; we can't follow someone with this kind of message. And they refused to continue to listen him.

How about disciples like us? Are we listening to the Son of Man, especially when He says what may be a hard saying? Or are we turning our back on Him when what He says goes against what we have been accustomed to hearing from other, maybe secular, sources. Recent surveys, for example, show that Christians differ little from Americans generally in their attitude toward divorce. How can this be in our "no-fault divorce world" unless the Christian's attitudes are being shaped more by the world than by Christ's words? Repent!

Are we listening to Jesus and really inwardly digesting His words, like *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate"*? Especially when they challenge the assumptions we've had in the past? Like *"God wants me to be happy, so it's okay to do whatever I want that makes me happy"*? Yes, sinners think and act that way, and thereby walk with Jesus no longer. Repent!

Do we believe Jesus and His words when He says He gives eternal life by His flesh, by His words of Spirit and life that call us to believe? What Jesus says is hard, not easy — for disciples then and for disciples now. Oh, the message, itself, is not hard to understand: we are saved solely by the action of the Triune God, in the sending of the Son in the flesh to suffer and die to take the punishment for our sins. That message is not rocket science; every baptized infant believes it; you can hear Kindergarten children tell you that they are saved because Jesus died on the cross.

The message is not hard to understand. **The message is hard to believe.** As we heard again last week, it is impossible apart from God: that's why Jesus said in our Gospel lesson for today, *"no one can come to me unless it is granted him by*

the Father.” That’s why he said earlier, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me.*” It’s why He said, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*” It’s why He said, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*”

What God says regarding our salvation is **hard**. It seems harsh to some and they scoff at it. Christopher Hitchens, one of the recent radical atheists, wrote that God was immoral—for requiring what is impossible for man to do, for the sacrifice that God required of His own Son. Hitchens meted out plenty of abuse. For others, it just seems out of character for a God who is love, so surely Jesus didn’t come to die on the cross, but “*to show us Christ consciousness,*” whatever that is.

But God indeed effected our salvation through Jesus. He sent this living Bread from heaven in the flesh and blood person of Jesus and baked him on the tree of the cross and the grave. But this powerful bread of life burst forth from the hot oven of God’s wrath over our sin, triumphing over death and the devil by His resurrection. And this living bread now gives Himself, the real food of His flesh and the real drink of His blood, for the life of the world. Far from immoral, far from unloving, God has done for us in His Son what we are powerless to do on our own. That may be a **hard** saying, for we want some credit for it; but deep down, we know it’s true. Lord, help us keep on listening to You and so believe.

“*Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*” The Father said of Jesus, “*This is my beloved Son, listen to him.*” Jesus said, “*It’s the Spirit who gives life,*” and “*the words I have spoken to you, they are spirit and life.*” “*Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*” “*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*”

That’s hard, not easy: hard to listen to, hard to ponder, hard to believe. Therefore, with many around us today turning their backs on Jesus, His question to the twelve is asked also of us today: “*Do you also wish to go away? Do you want to reject Me in the way I have chosen to come to you? I have chosen to come to you in the flesh to give my life for the life of the world. I come to you now in the **word** — spirit filled water and word; life-giving words of forgiveness of sins, hard words heralding Me and My flesh and blood sacrifice for you because of your sins, comforting words of My triumph over death, strengthening words carried to your mouth by My body and blood in the heavenly foretaste of the feast to come, hopeful words of eternal life. Do you wish to stop listening to Me, to my words?*”

May the Lord lead us boldly to confess with Peter and the twelve: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Thank you God for our*

Christ's Words: Hard But the Words of Eternal Life — John 6:51-69

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faith, for we believe and know that Jesus is the Holy one of God come down from heaven in our flesh for our life.” Lord, preserve us in this confession.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.