

Twenty First Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 23, 2015

This week's gospel reading marks the conclusion of Jesus' teaching on the bread of life from John's gospel, chapter 6. Unfortunately, many of Jesus' followers were confused by his message. They said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

Then we hear quite possibly the saddest verse in all of Scripture: "As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied [Jesus]."

How heartbreaking. Because one particular teaching was "hard," they refused to accept all of Jesus' teachings and returned to "their former way of life" which presumably was a life separated from God.

Now, maybe you'll remember from last week what teaching was so hard that it caused people to leave Jesus. It was Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist, when He told the crowd, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

That teaching certainly rubbed people the wrong way 2,000 years ago and it continues to rub people the wrong way today – even among good people who are convinced that they love Jesus and wish to do His will.

But there are plenty of other "hard sayings" from Jesus that cause people to walk away from Him. For example, in Matthew chapter 19 when Jesus made it clear that He does not approve of divorce: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh....they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God

has joined together, no human being must separate....whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.”

Certainly Jesus doesn't want anyone to remain in an abusive relationship. If physical and emotional injuries are being inflicted on a spouse by the other spouse, the victim needs to seek safety.

But what percentage of divorces nowadays occurs because of abuse? How many occur instead because one or both of the partners are bored, annoyed, unfulfilled, or just looking to try something new? And how many people in this second category, after breaking up a marriage they vowed would last “till death do us part” simply walk away from Jesus and His Church because what He taught about divorce is “hard”?

The fact is, nowadays the divorce rate among Christians is indistinguishable from that of non-Christians. If anything, non-believers get divorced slightly less often than Christians. How sad and ultimately, how tragic.

There are other lessons from Jesus and the Scriptures that fall into this same “hard saying” category: same-sex marriage and abortion are just two of many examples. Now no one can find specific verses from Jesus on these topics like there are on the topics of the Eucharist and divorce.

But can we really find it persuasive, as some claim, that since Jesus didn't specifically denounce same-sex marriage or abortion then that He approves of them? Following that logic, can we say that since Jesus didn't specifically denounce drunk driving, then it must be OK?

The fact is that many of the things Jesus expects of us are indeed "hard." But if we walk away from Him because we don't like His teachings or don't understand His teachings or don't think we have the willpower to follow His teachings, we're certain to find ourselves lost and rudderless.

Why? Because of what Peter said toward the end of this week's gospel reading. After being challenged by Jesus as to whether he was going to walk away also, Peter said, "Master, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life."

There comes a time when we have to make a choice.

We can't keep putting it off or think it doesn't matter what we believe or that we can just play the field because that's what most people do.

The great temptation is to postpone our act of faith, to cruise within a culture that frowns on faith and approves sophisticated skepticism. We may think we can get by being decent and fair, a good person who cares about others. But when the time comes, either a health crisis or loss of a friend or family member, we will begin, however quietly or anonymously, to rediscover our need for God.

Are we to live a moral life, or join those who mock everyone because of their commitment to Jesus? The choice is there for us. Like Peter, we have to realize that no one else has the words of eternal life.

Like Joshua, we have to decide to follow the way of Lord. That means that we're called to stand apart from those elements of society that make noises as though they are the enlightened majority. Because they are neither...neither enlightened nor a majority.

Those who see good in every evil have lost their way. In their deification to political

correctness, they have demanded a society where all morality is subjected to the glorification of the individual. Their only morality is relativism.

They admit no rules regarding right or wrong, everything depends on the person's desires or feelings at any given moment.

They would have us believe "That which is right for one person can certainly be wrong for another."

For them there are no values such as fidelity, honesty, and basic respect. Everything is relative. As a result they really cannot have a society. And they ask us to join them. Worse, they demand that we join them. The decision is right there in front of us and it cannot be escaped. Do we go along with what supposedly everyone is saying is now acceptable, or at least now acceptable for us, or do we follow Peter's example by saying, "Lord where would we go? You have the words of eternal life."