

21B 2018 SML
JN 6:60-69

For the Apostle who usually speaks before He thinks, today's Gospel had to be one of St. Peter's finer hours. We can't take this away from him. In answer to Our Blessed Lord's question, "Do you also want to leave (Me)?" think of the power, the tenderness, the love, and the utter honesty of Peter's response, answering a question with a question, "Lord to whom shall we go?" "Lord, where are we going to go?"

His question comes at the end of John's famous Bread of Life Discourse as Our Blessed Lord is watching people walk away from Him after He had just given them that magnificent promise of the Eucharist and of life eternal.

To be completely honest, there may have even been a bit of exasperation in his response, more like, "For crying out loud, Lord, where are we going to go?" More like,

- ✓ "You know, Lord . . .
- ✓ Most of the time we don't understand what You're teaching
- ✓ Most of the time, it goes right over our heads
- ✓ Most of the time, we can't make much sense out of it
- ✓ Most of the time, what you say is difficult and demanding.

✓ So yes, there's been times we've been tempted to walk away . . .

But we don't care. You're all we've got. We have come to love, believe in, hope in and know you have the words of everlasting life. There is no where else to go, so we're in it for the long haul. So while sometimes it doesn't make much sense with You, it would make absolutely no sense without You. So, yeah, like I said, 'Where are we going to go?' And to be completely honest, how many here could have taken these words right out of our mouths?

Let's take this one step further, because for you and me as believers, as Catholics, Jesus is alive, present and active in His Church, so it's a package deal for us. There is no separating Christ from His Church. So when we say with Peter, "Lord where are we going to go?" We add, "You and Your Church have the words of everlasting life." Talk about a tough teaching. That's a very unpopular one today, especially in light of the recent revelations these past few weeks regarding the current crisis in the Church.

Columnist Father Ron Rolheiser claims it used to be said we lived in a post-Christian era. Now he says, "Forget it. We don't live in a post-Christian era now. Jesus is very popular.

Everybody loves Jesus. Today, we live in a post-Church era; now we have believers but not “belongers.” We have people who want the King without the Kingdom. People want Jesus, but not His Church. Given the headlines these last few weeks, more want Jesus, less want His Church. But for Catholics, that distinction is impossible because Christ and the Church are one.

The distinction is impossible because we place great stock in the words of Our Ascended Lord to Saul on the Road to Damascus. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (AA 9:4) Jesus didn’t say, “Why are you persecuting My people” or “Why are you persecuting the Church?” He said, “Why are you persecuting Me?” He and His Church are synonymous. Asking “What is the Church?” is asking the wrong question. We should be asking, “Who is the Church?” Christ is the Church.

A theist is someone who believes in God. A Christian is a theist who believes Jesus is the Son of God. A Catholic is a Christian who believes Jesus is alive in His Church.

Just as there is a bit of exasperation in the voice of Peter as He speaks of his love for Christ, let’s be honest, we find it exasperating at times to love the Church. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, herself a convert to

Catholicism, said, “The Church is at times the spotless bride of Christ, and at other times she is the whore of Babylon, but we love her to death because she is Christ and she has the words of everlasting life.” As Father Rohlheiser says, “The Church is always God hung between two thieves.”

Grappling with the question of reconciling that Christ is the Church, and the wrong that occurs inside the Church, the Lord put before my eyes just this week, in a book I began reading just this week entitled Why the Church? by Father Luigi Giussani, founder of Communion and Liberation the following:

. . . A self-awareness that the Church has of itself in all times in an explicit and mature form: the fact of being composed of the *human* and *divine*. This part is extremely important from the dialectical point of view. No objection is possible, because everything that is deviant, in terms of human nature and actions, can be contained within the Church because it is made up of human beings. However, at the same time, it is the bearer of a reality that is not human. And this divine reality is expressed as both knowledge and grace . . . hence in the Church things become possible which otherwise would be impossible,

but not for God; because for God everything is possible.

(MK 10:27)

Priest and poet Father Carlo Carretto wrote this in his 1984 autobiography (I Sought and I Found):

How much I criticize you, my Church, and yet how much I love you. You have made me suffer and yet I owe more to you than anybody else. You have given me much scandal, and yet you alone have made me understand holiness.

Never in this world have I seen anything more compromised, more false, and yet never have I touched anything more pure, more generous, more beautiful.

Countless times have I felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face, and yet every night I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms. No, I cannot be free of you for I am one with you. Then, too, where else would I go?

(today's gospel – my addition) To build another Church?

But I could not build one without the same defects because they happen to be mine. It would then be my church, not yours. No, I'm old enough to know better.

In the end, some think our Church is too old and too wrinkled, too out of it. She needs serious change in such things

as her sexual morality; she needs a cleansing of the patriarchal priesthood. Others think our Church is too young and too brash, having wavered on doctrine, too tolerant of heresy, too quick to accommodate the whims of the world. One thing is clear. The love that we bear for Jesus and His Church is not always going to be carefree and satisfying, that's for sure. It is going to entail sacrifice and frustration and suffering, caused from within and without.

But Jesus asks each of us this morning/evening? "Will you leave me too?" And with Peter, the first pope, we reply, "Lord, where are we going to go? You and Your Church have the words of everlasting life."