

## **John 6:56-69**<sup>vii</sup> <sup>viii</sup>

Jesus said: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe."

For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

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### <sup>vii</sup> **About John 6:56-69**

Today's gospel reading describes the reaction of the large group of disciples following Jesus, and especially of the twelve disciples, to Jesus' words. The question is: To which words in particular are they responding? Overall, the passage returns to the terms of 6:35-50 (Jesus as the word/bread of revelation) rather than continuing the specifically eucharistic theme of 6:51-59.

The particular claim that the disciples call a "hard saying" (that is, offensive or difficult, but

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not in itself obscure) may be the assertion that Jesus is the bread “come down from heaven” (6:38, 51) to which the Jews have already objected (6:41). This would balance the statement about “ascending where he was before” (3:13). The “flesh (which) is of no avail” is not the eucharistic flesh of Jesus as in 6:51-59, but the flesh (3:6) as the natural principle of frailty which cannot give eternal life. And again, as in 6:35-50, the issue is believing in Jesus, not specifically eating his flesh.

The ascension, rather than the suffering, of the Son of man is obliquely prefigured in accordance with the image of the Son of man as a celestial being in Daniel 7. Peter names Jesus “the Holy One of God,” that is, one consecrated to God as were Samson (Judges 13:7, 16:17a) and Aaron (Psalm 106:16). For John, this title means the Christ, the anointed one (10:36). The title appears in Mark spoken by a demon (Mark 1:24) and is used by Peter in Acts (Acts 3:14). The harsh words addressed to Peter in Mark and Matthew (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33) are in John transferred to Judas (6:70-71).

## <sup>viii</sup> **Reflection and Response**

The hard sayings Jesus gave to his disciples are still hard. That our true life depends on spiritual certainties rather than earthly realities requires a tremendous leap of faith. Even if we, like Peter, give Christ our allegiance, wholehearted trust is more difficult to attain. The universe is full of gods to choose from—they range from pseudo-Messiahs to devils. In between are the enticements of hedonistic pleasures and worldly crowns. Like the tribes in Joshua, we can choose from a dazzling array. Can we say, as they did, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”?

The mystical union of Christ with his Church is not an evident fact within Christendom. The Body of Christ is rent with divisions like those of an incompatible marriage. We have marred the model marriage of Christ with his Church by not really understanding the hard sayings that he has given us. The marriage covenant with Christ means to forsake all others and have no other gods.

We are drawn to God by love—just as human love draws us toward a particular person and inspires the desire for a permanent commitment. Mutual choice makes a covenant. The earthly things we know point to heavenly realities. A strong marriage is one in which union transcends the separate existence of husband and wife. The desire of each to give all to the other means that both receive from each other.

God has pledged love and blessings to us forever. God has told us this most explicitly through

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Christ. How poignant is Jesus' question to his disciples: "Do you also wish to go away?" May we answer him with Peter's firm conviction: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."