

Homily for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B  
St. Monica Catholic Church  
Dallas, TX  
August 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**Proverbs 9:1-6**

**Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7**

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

**John 6:51-58**

My father was raised a Southern Baptist in Mississippi—and he was a very good one! He went to Baylor University—which is a Baptist school—he went to Baptist seminary, and he was even ordained as a Baptist minister.

Now my dad did not practice the ministry for very long, but his Baptist background left him with a deep love for Scripture. Because of his education, our house was always filled with Bibles, and Scriptural commentaries, and spiritual books.

One day after my family became Catholic, I was poking around through these books at home and I found the Bible that my Dad used as a Baptist seminarian. Nearly every page of this Bible was filled with

handwritten notes, and comments, and reflections, and insights on the stories of sacred Scripture.

As I scanned my father's notes, I decided to flip to the sixth chapter of John's Gospel to see what the Baptist seminarian version of my Dad thought about the Eucharist. I discovered that, next to the verses we just heard today, his Bible had no notes. The only thing on the page in my Dad's handwriting was a single, small question mark.

For my Dad, Jesus' words, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" created questions, not answers.

Now this question mark is not a uniquely Baptist phenomenon. Even for Catholics, this Gospel can be difficult. Catholics believe that Jesus says these things in order to prepare his people for the Eucharist...but even with that knowledge, the Lord's words can still cause us to scratch our heads. We might ask with his disciples today, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" What does Jesus mean? What does this have to do with my life?

Instead of clarifying the situation...Jesus doubles down. Over and over again in the Gospel, Jesus repeats that his “flesh is true food, and [his] blood is true drink.” There is no wiggle room. He lays out the teaching before us, and then he waits for us to decide: do we believe him or do we not? This is the central questions that Jesus’ disciples have to answer.

As Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we also have to ask this question. Do we believe Jesus, or do we not? At this moment in our Church’s history, this question has found us and is looking us right in the eyes. The horrific crimes against children committed by some of the spiritual leaders of our Church—crimes that sometimes were covered up and buried instead of being brought to light—have led some people to question the foundations of their faith. As we all cry out for justice for the victims, many of us have also asked ourselves, “What does this mean for our Church?” “Is this true?” “Do I believe in Jesus, or do I not?”

Even as we take concrete steps to ensure that justice is served and that these crimes never happen again, the question remains. With Jesus’

disciples today, we have to make a choice about what Jesus says. There is no staying neutral anymore, because we live in a world where the passive faith of a bystander simply won't survive. Is what Jesus says about himself, about the Eucharist, about the Church, about eternal life—true? Or is it not?

Each of us has to make this decision ourselves. The moral catastrophe of the past week forces our hand. We have to choose. If Jesus is who he says he is—if Jesus is “the living bread that came down from heaven”—then we can say, “Yes, Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God. I believe that you are the Bread of Life. I believe that whoever eats your flesh and drinks your blood remains in you and you in him.”

We are Catholic because of Jesus Christ. We are Catholic because Jesus tells us that his real presence is in the Eucharist. We are Catholic because through the Catholic Church Jesus brings us his life-giving body and blood at every single Mass. The crimes we learned of this past week make declaring our faith in Jesus more difficult, but not impossible. We have to make the decision.

As we now prepare to declare our belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in the Creed, and as we prepare to declare our belief in Jesus' Eucharistic presence at Holy Communion, I invite all of us to descend to the heart of our faith, to the heart of Jesus' words in today's Gospel, and to hear him say, "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." But then I invite each of us to ask the question: "Do I believe him, or do I not?"