

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 26th 2018

I can't, Mom, it's too haaarrd," my kids would wail when I asked them to do something challenging. It was probably in the same voice and complaint I used with my mother when I was a child. And in today's gospel, the disciples, probably in the same timeless whine, tell Jesus his message is just too much. "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

Jesus has just told the crowd "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." Some of them recoil. Then he continues, "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

Those who could not tolerate Jesus' message, simply left. Many "returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him."

Pope Francis noted that even some of the disciples "failed to accept the disturbing language of the Lord," and not because they didn't understand it. Francis said that they understood what he was saying, but "they don't want to listen to it. And the words of Jesus always make us uncomfortable."

Jesus uses graphic imagery to describe how we need to rely utterly and completely in him. To turn our lives over to him and use him as the food and drink for our lives. And, it is hard!

To really follow the teachings of Jesus completely challenges every moment of our lives. To rely on Jesus means I let go of the tight grip on my own life and allow Jesus to help me live my life, even in unpopular decisions. In Matthew 25, Jesus asks us to feed and clothe those who are in need. To care for the poor; to welcome those who are strangers.

Yet to translate those to my own life means to put aside my own need to be liked, in favor of promoting unpopular policies that offer care for the poor and welcome to immigrants. It means challenging words and comments that are racist. It means not insisting on my own need to win a petty spat with my husband. I can only do that if I feel the full support and nurturing of Jesus in my life.

Yet, as Pope Francis pointed out, Jesus watched some of his disciples leave because it was too hard, yet he did not soften his language. In fact, Francis notes, Jesus "forces us to make a clear choice: either to be with him or separated from him-- and He says to the Twelve: "Do you also want to leave?"

The often-timid Peter, in a moment of grace and clarity, seems to ask almost with wonder, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

In today's first reading, the people of Israel must also choose whether or not they will follow the Lord. Joshua challenges them to pull themselves together and really decide if they will serve the Lord or not. As they remember gratefully everything the Lord has done for them, they respond, "We also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

The reading from Paul also gives us a chance to choose what the real message is. When I was younger, it seemed that I was assigned to be a lector anytime Paul called for wives to be subordinate to their husbands. But I finally realized that in the context of his time, his real message was a radical

departure from the norm, as he repeatedly calls for husbands to love their wives. In a time where marriage was arranged in a business-like way, he was saying to go beyond the expected roles and to actually love each other.

Peter proclaims that Jesus has the words of eternal life. Words not only for our lives today in every detail but for an eternal life beyond what we know. Today we can ask ourselves who Jesus is for me and how I want to encounter him. How can I feed on his words and actions and how can I make them a living part of each day?

Jesus, I know you are with me in the everyday-ness of my life. Help me to recognize you, to remember your teachings and to have the courage to follow them more closely. Help me to keep my fears, pride and independence from letting me rely on you totally. Let me remember the words of Pope Francis:

The more we are with you, the more our desire to be with you grows.

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