

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OT - B

In order to appreciate the reaction of the crowd in today's Gospel we have to recall the section of John, Chapter 6 that we missed last Sunday because of the observance of the Solemnity of the Assumption.

After telling the crowd that he is the Bread of Life, Jesus insists that his disciples must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Jesus doesn't soften his message by suggesting that he is speaking metaphorically, instead he "doubles down" by asserting that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink.

In response, many of those who had followed Jesus up to this point exclaim, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

These words have been repeated down through the centuries.

Faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a gift of grace given by the Father, but many have closed their hearts and minds to it.

And yet the Church's belief that the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Christ is based on the words of Jesus which he himself says are "Spirit and life."

The Eucharist is the supreme expression of Jesus loving his Bride, the Church, "handing himself over to sanctify her," nourishing her, and becoming one with her members in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Do we believe this?

The first reading contains that powerful declaration of faith made by Joshua: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!"

We echo these words every time we make the decision to come to Mass

In that same spirit we are challenged to make the words of Peter in today's Gospel our own: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

In the celebration of the Eucharist Jesus gives us both the Word and the Bread of eternal life.

As grateful as we are for the ability to live-stream the Mass and watch it from home, it's no substitute for being present here in church if we are able to do so.

Although we speak about the "obligation" to attend Mass, it is truly a privilege.

There are so many places in the world where Mass is not available every Sunday.

Even in our own country there are parishes that are visited by a priest only once a month.

I recently received in the mail a request for financial assistance from the Bishop of Fairbanks, Alaska to help fund the cost of flying priests to their far-flung missions.

How blessed we are to have all of the choices of Mass times in so many places every weekend!

As we give praise and thanks to God for the gift of the Holy Eucharist and our ability to participate in this sacred meal, let us pray that all of our parishioners who are able to will come back to church and gather with us around this holy table.