

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b
 Psalm 34:2-3, 16-17,
 18-19, 20-21
 Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:2a,
 25-32
 John 6:60-69



Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 25, 2024

REFLECTION

Today's reading picks up where we left off last week in the Gospel of John. What "saying" was so hard for the disciples to accept? Over the past several weeks, we have read from John 6, hearing the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and what is known as the "Bread of Life" discourse—Jesus' teaching on his identity as the Bread of Life and the fact we must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life.

This teaching was so hard to accept that many of the disciples left. Yet when he asked the Twelve (the apostles) if they wanted to leave, Simon Peter's response was honest, real, and relatable to the journey of mature faith. He neither pretends to understand everything nor demands an explanation. Rather, while questioning and following, he confesses trust in Jesus as the "Holy One of God" (John 6:69) and surrenders his unknowing. There is an important difference between a blind faith that never questions, doubt that insists on proof, and a mature faith that seeks understanding, fruitfully lives out that faith in love, and explicitly develops a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are all called to develop this mature faith.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How does asking questions help us learn things?
- ❖ What role does questioning have in your own journey to mature?

ACTION

Throughout the Gospel accounts, we see the closest followers of Jesus struggling to understand all that Jesus is teaching them. Yet, in the end, they trust in his words. This week, explore the way the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the characteristics of faith and the role of questioning (see paragraphs 153-165; <https://ltp.org/s/catechism-faith>). In light of this explanation, evaluate your own questions. Are they seeking understanding or insisting on proof? Make a list of your questions and talk about them with your youth minister or another teacher of the faith.



Gain confidence in asking good questions of your faith; watch "How to Question Your Faith Well."
<https://youtu.be/IHhucN1JIZo>



August 25, 2024

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #122B

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Psalms 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32

John 6:60-69

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

This weekend's Gospel reading wraps up the Bread of Life discourse that we have reflected on for the past four weeks. Jesus, recognizing the difficulty of this teaching, acknowledges that some will not believe. This teaching may even have been the breaking point for some of his disciples. In the end, many left Jesus, yet his closest followers chose to remain and trust in his word. In reflecting on this today, the young people will be asked to consider how their own faith has been challenged and if they can place their trust in Jesus even when they don't understand things.

Q FOCUS: Let us place our trust in Jesus' word.

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On August 27, we honor St. Monica, whose steadfast prayers for her son brought about a tremendous conversion in him. She is a great example of the power of prayer and the way we can place our trust in God, even about those who are closest to us. The very next day we honor her son, St. Augustine. Wayward in his youth, intellectually sharp, and open to growth, Augustine lived passionately throughout his life. First those passions led him far away from God, but later he became passionate about sharing the

truth of God. He wrote about his conversion in his autobiography *Confessions* that is still published!

Church Teaching Connection

"If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31): this is the source of the peace found in the saints. Such inner strength makes it possible for us, in our fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world, to give a witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good. It is a sign of the fidelity born of love, for those who put their faith in God (*pístis*) can also be faithful to others (*pístós*). They do not desert others in bad times; they accompany them in their anxiety and distress, even though doing so may not bring immediate satisfaction" (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, 112).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:60-69

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the

flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.”

As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► Has it ever felt too hard to follow Jesus?

There are many things that could cause us to feel this way. Maybe the crowd around us thinks it's uncool to be a Christian. Perhaps the strict morality feels like it is getting in the way of having a good time. It could even be that you aren't sure it is actually possible to do so.

The disciples experienced this challenge to their faith in today's Gospel reading. Just a few weeks ago, Jesus performed a mighty miracle and those who experienced it numbered more than five thousand! Afterward they came by boat and by foot to look for him. He was exciting, powerful, and had something they wanted.

Then Jesus began to teach them with a hard teaching. It made the crowd feel uncomfortable. They were challenged because it wasn't just about feeling good or getting everything they wanted. It wasn't easy. It was a teaching at the heart of who

Jesus was. He was the savior, and these people needed saving.

This wasn't the message they wanted to hear. They wanted more bread, more miracles, more amazement. What they were getting was the blueprint to eternal life and it was at the core of Jesus' mission and identity. He told them that he was the Bread of Life and that anyone who wishes to have eternal life must eat his flesh and drink his blood. It was more than they could handle; more than they could believe.

Jesus knew it was a hard teaching. His words were “Spirit and life.” In order to understand them, people needed to be open to the Spirit's transforming power in their lives.

► What are some teachings of Jesus that you have found hard to follow or that young people in general might find hard to follow?

► What might Jesus have been feeling as those who couldn't accept his teaching walked away?

Jesus couldn't change his message just to make people like him or keep following him. The message he was proclaiming was the truth of who God is and what God was doing in the world. Jesus was being open and honest, sharing his whole self and not putting on a show for others. The crowd's rejection of Jesus' message was a rejection of Jesus himself.

Jesus' message is so central to what he was doing on earth that he even questioned his closest friends as to how they felt about it. If they couldn't accept his teaching, he would have let them leave. That's who Jesus is.

► Have you ever had a friend who stuck with you in spite of challenging times? Or, have you ever stayed friends with someone even though you have faced difficult situations? How did it make you feel to overcome these challenges?

Jesus told his potential followers the truth of who he was, even though he knew it would be hard. And he let them choose if they would still follow him. For those who remained, their faith became personal that day. It was strengthened by overcoming challenges. They could have chosen to leave, like the crowds did earlier. Instead, they trusted in him. They leaned into everything they learned and

believed that even if they didn't have all the answers, they were still with him.

Jesus trusts us with that same choice today. Will we trust and follow, even if the teachings are hard? We pray we can respond like Peter did. Where else will we go? Jesus has the words of everlasting life.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 18.

Jesus lost many followers when he told them that he was the Bread of Life.

His closest followers chose to stay with him, even if they did not fully understand.

Jesus gives us the choice to follow him and trust in his word, even when it is hard.

Act on the Word

Did Jesus Teach That?

For this activity, you will need a whiteboard or poster paper, writing utensils, sheets of paper, Bibles, and a copy of the Catechism.

Remind the teens that during the Bread of Life discourse we have been hearing over the past several weeks, would-be followers of Jesus were faced with difficult truths. In the end, many left, and Jesus even asked his closest disciples about their beliefs.

During this activity, the teens will have an opportunity to explore their own beliefs and come to a deeper understanding of what Jesus said and taught. Many of us can name different teachings of Jesus, but do we really know what he said and taught? Many outside influences can shape the way we understand things and potentially cloud the truth of what Jesus tells us.

Divide the large group into small groups of about five to seven people. Have each group brainstorm a list of things they believe Jesus taught. It can range from anything church related to morality or anything in between. Encourage the teens to really stretch themselves and share what they think Jesus taught, even if it is controversial. Be sure to remind the young people not to judge one another for the

things they share. The goal of the activity is for everyone to come to a better understanding of what Jesus asks of us.

After sufficient discussion time, have the groups report their discussion notes and write them on the big board. Review the overall list and see if it contains any errors. When possible, have the teens find related and relevant passages in the Gospels. When you come to a teaching that is false, cross it out and share with the young people how that might seem like something Jesus taught but was not actually from him nor is it part of the teaching of the Church. You might want to reference the Catechism here for extra support in explaining things. If there are any teachings you are unable to confirm, make sure to research them before your group's next gathering and share it with the teens then.

If there is one of Jesus' teachings that seems especially difficult for your group to accept, spend some time talking about it. Share with them that it can be very difficult to follow Jesus in today's world, yet the promise of salvation and eternal life he offers are well worth the challenges we face today. He will help us persevere through them!

Close the activity by having everyone share one difficulty in following Jesus and one hope in following Jesus. Then pray together for any concerns that have arisen in your discussion.

Closing Prayer

O God,
you call us to follow you as disciples.

Even when we are challenged
by the task before us,
help us to respond to that call
with a joyful heart.

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.