



## CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

August 23, 2015

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Gospel reading John 6:60-69 [To be read aloud]

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."

### Brief commentary:

Although broadly inclusive, the movement that Jesus began did call on people joining him to abandon former limiting ways of thinking and believing, of valuing and living, in favor of his liberating gospel and his community of disciples. Being Christian is not simply continuing life *as if* God was now going to accept and conform to each person, but rather it calls for conforming our lives to God's ways, regardless of personal or public opinion. We are to beware of religious ideas and attitudes that do not call for moral transformation – that simply affirm our own beliefs, wants and wishes without any change or exigencies. Such is not the transformative gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus often confronted the status quo and questioned the popular ideas of the times that did not reflect the values of the reign of God. But much more than that, he offered a vision that is much more far-reaching, much more forward-looking, much more liberating and revolutionary than what conventional forms of thinking offer. Moreover, his gospel also has profound personal and social, moral and ethical, economic and political, implications. Coming to Jesus means often putting aside our own preconceived notions, perspectives, attitudes and plans, and yes – sin – and adopting *his* vision and mission. We are baptized not into a political party, a social agenda, a popular movement, or into newly fashionable ways of thinking and living; rather, we are baptized into Jesus Christ and it is to *him* that we owe our allegiance above everything else. In today's gospel reading we meet an uncompromising Jesus. Yes, in no way does he coerce, manipulate, or force his followers to continue with him: he assures them that they are truly totally free to choose. Whoever follows him must do so freely. Yet, whoever follows him must also know that they must also freely put aside whatever is incongruent with his teaching, and in faith adopt his gospel, making Jesus' teaching her/his own. In today's Old Testament reading Joshua calls on the Israelites to "choose this day whom they will serve." They too know they are free; but if choosing the covenant with God, then they are to conform their lives not to the world's way of believing, thinking and living, but to that of God's laws. In today's letter to the Ephesians a Christian vision of marriage – and the ethics that governs it – is far different from new popular promulgations of marriage that so many (including many Christians) uncritically accept with blind faith. True, the language in Ephesians of "subordination" has to be balanced with the idea of the full equality of the genders so championed in many other passages of scripture, as well as with the text's own emphasis on love rather than superiority or dominance on the part of the husband. Yet, the foundation is indisputable: *Christian* marriage, at least, is truly the free union of a man and a woman in faithful love, open to life and family, open to generosity and hospitality, a "school of humanity and of love" for each new generation. Never perfect, Christian married couples' need to nurture a vision of marriage that is the alternative to the more individualistic vision that is guiding many societies today. Yes, many may abandon Christ's vision on this and on many other issues of life if they wish...they are free: "If you want to leave you may leave as well." But like Peter, Christians turn to Jesus saying, "Master, to whom shall we go? *You* [not a political party, not the celebrities, not public popular opinion, not the universities, not the "supreme" court, not the government, not my friends, not even me] have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Christians are to support and encourage the Christian way of marriage, particularly through their own example. And not only marriage, but everything else that the Gospel sets forth as humanizing. The Christian chooses Jesus Christ in whom God has established his covenant of true freedom and true love.

### Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Today's readings are about choosing between what God has revealed and what often competes with it. Jesus' gospel has real moral and ethical – as well as faith – implications.
- More than a quarrel about the Eucharist, today's gospel offers us an example of how coming to believe in and follow Jesus Christ involves embracing his vision and mission above everything else.
- Christians today face the challenge to discern society's popular views on a range of issues. Some are congruent with the Gospel and some are not. Our allegiance is foremost to Jesus Christ. In this way Christians are at times to be truly non-conformists in a society that seems to have the answers and also pressures conformity with its values.

### For our shared or personal reflection: - *After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.*

- How have I had to choose between the covenant with God and social pressures?
- How am I embracing Jesus' own vision and mission, with its moral implications?
- In what way do I need to "die to self" in order to be born again more fully in Jesus Christ and bear fruit for the kingdom of God?

**Suggested readings:** Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 144-84, 1601-66