

**Homily – John 6: 60 – 69**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B**  
**Vigil Mass, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2021**

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There is the story that during the Second World War, certain Nazis shot down a group of Jews and buried them in a mass grave. A wounded twelve-year-old boy was still alive. He dug his way out of the shallow dirt and went around the neighborhood seeking shelter in homes. The people knew what had happened and, when they saw the boy caked with dirt, they hurriedly shut the door in his face. One woman was about to do the same when the boy said: “Mom, don’t you recognize me? I’m the Jesus you Christians say you love.” The lady broke into tears and received the boy into her home. Well, she had made her choice for Jesus.

Now, concluding His long Eucharistic discourse, Jesus, in today’s Gospel challenges His Jewish audience, and later His apostles, to make their choice: to accept Him as the true Bread from Heaven Who gives them His Body and Blood as their Heavenly Food, or to join those who have lost their Faith in Jesus and left Him, expressing their confusion and doubts about His claims. The evangelist John tells us that the apostles

exercised their freedom of choice by choosing to stay with Jesus.

Now, to believe in Jesus is to have faith in Him and in His teaching. And the challenge before us is to have that faith which springs from our own personal experiences with the Risen Lord. The Psalmist would invite us thus: “Taste and see that the Lord is good”.

Thomas Merton a drifting agnostic intellectual was a professor of literature at Columbian university in New York. Merton out of curiosity used to stop at the Corpus Christi Parish in the campus and there he would be moved seeing the deep faith and the piety of the people at Mass. He observed them as they reverently genuflected before the tabernacle, bowed their heads at the consecration, and humbly approached the Holy Communion. He saw them return to their pews, transfixed, obviously in union with Christ. He couldn't believe it. Day after day, he watched them and then he said: “These people really believe that the Son of God is present there in that wafer of unleavened bread and then he finally admitted: and, “so do I”. Soon he would enter the Church; become a trappist monk and of course, eventually one of the greatest spiritual Theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yes! Jesus Christ is

really and truly present in the most Holy Eucharist – body, blood, soul and divinity.

Well, many of His disciples deserted the Lord very simply because following Christ involved the Cross, which meant the complete denial of oneself. Many could not receive and accept this as a fact and as a reality. They walked away.

But then Jesus asked the twelve, the chosen ones: Do you also wish to go away? The words of Jesus provoked a great act of faith from Peter and he proclaims: “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of Eternal life.” His answer was full of trust. True, Peter may not have understood the full importance of what Jesus was saying, but he knew the essential. And that is, Christ has the words of eternal life.

In October 2015 with a team from *Caritas internationalis* Cardinal Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, Philippines, went to a refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece close to the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the camp, there were thousands of tired, hungry, confused and anxious refugees from different parts of the world. They were longing not only for food, drink, shelter and safety, but even for hospitality and welcome. And in the midst of the tensions and commotion, Bishop noticed an

energetic lady, the Vice Mayor of Idomeni who was managing the distribution of food. At one point, Bishop Tagle asked her whether it was her job as Vice Mayor to manage the distribution of food. And she said: “No! This is just my volunteer work”. Amazed the Bishop asked her: “but then, why do you need to volunteer since you already are busy as the Vice Mayor of the Town?”. And her answer was quite touching. She said: “My ancestors were also refugees. I have refugee DNA in my body. I will never forsake them. They are my brothers and sisters”. I believe, it is exactly there, that the bread of life becomes life giving.

Well! We have to transcend the culture of alienating individualism with the Eucharistic culture of convocation, gathering and communion in love. We need each other. And we are called to be with others in the meal that the Lord hosts. And there when I see or when I recognize a brother or a sister, I discover myself, ‘sinful but loved, undeserving but invited, shamed but embraced, lost but trusted’. That was how Jesus hosted and participated in meals by calling together the most unimaginable combination of people to a community to become his family, his body. Remember how Jesus broke the isolation of those pushed aside by a culture of alienating individualism. We have the examples of Mathew the tax collector, Zacheus, the sinful woman

who washed the feet of Jesus, the centurion, the Syrophenician woman and recall the eternal isolation of the rich man who totally ignored the poor man Lazarus.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say: “I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed Him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash Him and tend to Him. I serve because I love Jesus.” And our beloved Holy Father Pope Francis would say: “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, or on a journey.”

Well dear brothers and sisters, may this Eucharistic celebration help us to see Jesus in everyone, and may we welcome each and everyone as they are with their unique qualities and differences. God bless you all,  
**Amen.**