

## Closing Prayer

God, in whom we abide continually,  
save us from losing heart  
when your teaching is hard to understand  
or difficult to put into practice.

Fill us rather with the life-giving Spirit,  
so that, knowing you to be so near to us,  
we may gladly serve and honour you,  
who alone possess the word of eternal life.

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Celebrating the Christian Year* · Proper 16, Year B<sup>2</sup>

Lectionary-based Catechesis • Year B

## Proper 16

*Sunday between 21 and 27 August inclusive* ·

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Principal Service readings

Joshua 24.1-2a,14-18

Joshua challenges the people to chose whom to serve

Psalms 34.15-22

The Lord helps those whose spirit is crushed

Ephesians 6.10-20

The spiritual war and armour for it

John 6.56-69

The bread that gives life for ever; Peter's profession of faith

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The bread of life*

Jesus said to the crowd: <sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' <sup>59</sup>He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup>When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

<sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' <sup>68</sup>Simon

<sup>2</sup> *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.

Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

John 6.56-69 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

The rejection by 'the Jews' of Jesus' outrageous suggestion 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (6.52) allows Jesus to conclude what he is saying about the true bread from heaven given through the gift of himself. The Jews are unable to go beyond the physical. Hints of the Eucharist insinuate themselves into the words of Jesus. The verb 'to eat' (*phagein*) becomes a verb indicating physical crunching with the teeth (*trōgein*). Flesh is to be broken and blood is to be spilled. Jesus compares the bread that comes down from heaven with the bread that Israel's ancestors ate. The manna could not provide eternal life, which the bread that comes down from heaven, that is, Jesus himself, can.

The major concern of the discourse on the bread of heaven is not eucharistic but is about the true bread from heaven replacing the former bread from heaven, the manna of the Law. The believer must accept the revelation of God through the broken flesh and the spilled blood. However, if one asks how this is experienced, then the explanation is that the flesh and blood of Jesus is encountered in the eucharistic celebration.

The teaching is quite provocative, and drives some people away (6.66), so Jesus asks his disciples if they too wish to go away (6.67). This prompts Peter's expression of faith: 'We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God' (6.69). Believing in Jesus is one of the underlying themes in John's gospel, and he says explicitly, towards the end of it: 'these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name' (20.31).

<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Quotations

1

The disciples who leave hear what Jesus says as a threat, a threat to their way of life, their accepted notions, their grip on reality. Those who continue faithful hear what Jesus says as a challenge. A challenge to their way of life, their accepted notions, their grip on reality. These disciples who remain may not completely understand what Jesus says. They may be uncomfortable with it. But somehow they are intrigued by what he says, and they are intrigued by him.

Charles Hoffacker, 2000

2

When we gather together for the Holy Eucharist, we catch a glimpse of the heavenly life that Jesus promises us. The Eucharist is that sacrament whereby we get a foretaste of that heavenly banquet when all things will be put to rights, when all hurts will be mended, when all tears will be wiped away, when all divisions will be repaired, when God will be all in all. This is why we call it Holy Communion. It is a holy union with God and with all of creation in relationship to God. And one of the things that distinguishes this breaking of bread from so many other meals is that everyone is welcome. The high and mighty and the lowly and humble; friends and enemies; relatives and strangers. All of God's children are welcome at God's table. All are companions, all are people we break bread with, because Christ himself is the bread that has been broken and the blood that has been poured out for the life and salvation of the whole world.

Joseph S. Pagano, 2012

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life; conversion; discipleship; eucharist; liturgy; Word of God; paschal mystery; salvation; reign of God; morality; law