

# 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle B

August 26, 2012 9:30 and 11am

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

## *“This saying is hard”*

The context for today’s gospel is that Jesus has just made some amazing statements.

Like, *“The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world”* (John 6.51). And again, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”* (John 6.54).

So, some of the people respond: *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”* These words got me thinking this past week.

I paged through the gospels and realized that today’s is not the only hard saying. There are others.

## **Hard Sayings**

For example, right at the beginning of the gospels, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph.

The angel explains that *“it is through the Holy Spirit that the child has been conceived”* in Mary (Matthew 1.10). This is a hard saying.

It goes against all we know about how children are conceived and born. And yet, could it be so?

Would the almighty, transcendent God who is the origin of the vast universe and the origin of the amazing complexity of the human body be limited to our ways and to what we know? Could not the divine become one with the human or emerge in humanity in a way that is beyond our imagination?

So, in the end, might we answer Jesus’ question, *“Do you also want to leave?”* in the same way Peter does? *“Master, to whom shall we go?”*

And then Jesus tells us to forgive *“seven times seventy-seven times”* (Matthew 18.22).

In the idiom of Jesus’ day, this means: never stop forgiving. This again is a hard saying.

Common sense tells us not to be a doormat and eventually just to be finished with an offensive person. No question, humanly speaking, we will remember and we usually cannot forget offenses.

But when we don’t forgive, whom are we really hurting? Aren’t we hurting ourselves as much as the other person by just being eaten up with loathing and hate?

So, once again, in the end, might we answer Jesus' question, "*Do you also want to leave?*" in the same way Peter does? "*Master, to whom shall we go?*"

And then Jesus says, "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" (Matthew 10.39).

This is also a hard saying. Aren't we supposed to find ourselves as persons and in that sense, find our lives?

And isn't it a good thing to seek my fulfillment in life? And yet, how many persons who focus so much on what they want end up feeling empty?

How many of us who are so successful feel that there is still something missing? On the flip side of it, isn't it true that so many of us who give of our life for the well-being of others – maybe for your children or for the parish children in the faith formation program or for those lacking life's basics – isn't it true that many of us who do this find inner fulfillment and find our life?

So, once again, in the end, might we answer Jesus' question, "*Do you also want to leave?*" in the same way Peter does? "*Master, to whom shall we go?*"

### Conclusion

There are other hard sayings.

There's the one about turning the other cheek (Matthew 5.39), the one about loving your enemies (Luke 6.27), the one about being great by being the servant of all (Matthew 20.26), the one about those who humble themselves being exalted (Luke 18.14), and the one about the first being last and the last being first (Matthew 20.16). You can probably think of others.

And yet, when we examine each of these, maybe there's really something here. So, today, to return to where we started, maybe Jesus, maybe God can break through and emerge in our midst in a piece of bread and a cup of wine.

Maybe this can be the way for Jesus to be present. And maybe this is why he says that this is his flesh and blood and if we have communion with him in this way, we have eternal life.

So, maybe, in the end, might we answer Jesus' question, "*Do you also want to leave?*" in the same way Peter does? "*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*"