

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, August 25, 2024
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle B

“Do you also want to leave?”

Today’s gospel passage tells us that Jesus’ disciples are murmuring or complaining about his teaching on the bread of life. Remember Jesus’ claim in last Sunday’s gospel passage: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh...”

The crowd and many of Christ’s disciples find this claim preposterous. If their sympathy for Jesus was mixed with a certain reserve in the beginning, now they want to dissociate themselves from him: “There is nothing to hope from this man who declares unbelievable things. What is the use of following him?” Greatly disappointed, they leave Jesus. The gospel reading narrates it this way: “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.”

This act of “leaving Jesus” happens when people are confronted with something that challenges their understanding, comfort or beliefs, and instead of grappling with the challenge, they walk away. This can happen in our lives in various ways today, particularly when we encounter difficult teachings, experiences, or situations that call us to deeper faith or moral integrity. St. John of the Cross once said, *“The soul that is quick to turn to human consolation is slow to turn to God.”* When we seek comfort in worldly things instead of persevering in faith, we are distancing ourselves from Jesus.

So, what are the ways we might be “leaving Jesus”?

1. Choosing Convenience Over Commitment:

Many times, like the disciples who left, we might prefer convenience over commitment. When following Jesus becomes challenging – whether it is in standing up for our faith, making sacrifices, or adhering to moral teachings—we may be tempted to walk away. This can happen in subtle ways, such as neglecting prayer, skipping Mass, or compromising our values and principles to fit in with societal norms.

2. Rejecting Difficult Teachings:

The teachings of Christ often challenge us to go beyond our comfort zones, especially in areas like forgiveness, love for enemies, sexual morality, or the call to serve the poor. When these teachings conflict with our personal desires or societal trends, we might distance ourselves from the fullness of the Gospel, choosing to follow a version of Christianity that suits us rather than embracing the entirety of Christ's message. G.K. Chesterton was absolutely right in saying,

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”

3. Prioritizing Worldly Success Over Spiritual Growth:

In a culture that highly values success, wealth, and social status, it can be easy to leave Jesus behind in pursuit of these goals. When our lives become consumed by ambitions, materialism, or the need for approval, we may inadvertently push Jesus to the margins, prioritizing the world's values and standards over spiritual growth and discipleship.

The Lord Jesus, in Matthew 16:26, tells us,

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

4. Indifference or Apathy:

Another way we might “leave Jesus” is through indifference or apathy.

When we stop caring about our faith or become lukewarm, we drift away from Jesus. This might manifest in a lack of interest in the sacraments, neglecting to participate in the community of faith, or ignoring the needs of others.

Today, let us renew our commitment to Jesus. Let us choose to stay with him, to trust in his words, and to live out what we receive in the Eucharist. When we are tempted to turn away, may we remember that only in Jesus will we find the strength, the grace, and the fulfillment we seek. Let us not be among those who leave, but rather, like Peter, let us stand firm in our faith, declaring with conviction,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

And as we walk with Christ, let our lives be a testimony to the world that, even in the face of difficulties and doubts, we have found in him the true source of life, love, and hope.