

Father O'Connor's Homily for 22 August 2021
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Joshua 24: 1-2a, 15-17, 18b
Ephesians 5: 21-32
John 6: 60-69

The great French composer, Hector Berlioz [1803-1869], was conducting a concert one evening in Europe. When it came to midnight, the rules of the concert hall allowed the musicians to decide whether or not they wanted to stay and play longer.

Well, it got to be midnight and Berlioz's own work, "Symphonie Fantastique," was yet to be played. Berlioz posed the customary question to the orchestra members and all but twelve got up and went home. So the embarrassed composer turned to the audience to tell them that he did not have enough musicians to properly perform his own work, and so they had to call it quits for the night.

Something like that was happening in today's Gospel. For five weeks now we have been reading from John's Gospel, chapter six. Jesus had multiplied the loaves and fish, and He was teaching that He is the Bread of Life, that "whoever eats this Bread will live forever" [John 6: 51], and that He would give us His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

That day many of His disciples left Him and went back to their former ways of life. They found His teaching to be too much for them. And so Jesus looks at the Twelve and asks them: "Do you also want to leave?"

And Simon Peter – God bless Simon Peter – answers: "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."

Simon Peter is speaking about faith for the long haul. Not simply first fervor, that initial spark of enthusiasm, but faith for the long haul, day after day, year after year.

And that is a challenge for all of us. It is easy to be faith-filled people when everything is going smoothly. But when things get tough, when the dullness of routine sets in, our faith can really be tested. And Jesus asks us too: "Do you also want to leave?"

Can we answer with Simon Peter: "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."

Disciples drifting away is not limited to Jesus' own day. I have been a priest for 46 years and have served in a number of places. I have seen families come to church for Baptism, First Penance, First Communion, Confirmation and then afterwards drift away, never to be seen again. I have seen people who have been strong and active in parish life, have a disagreement within the Church family, and then ride off into the sunset.

Being a disciple of Jesus does not insulate us from the troubles of life. Devout Christians still get cancer and high blood pressure. Devout Christians still worry about their families and their jobs. Devout Christians still lose their loved ones in separation and in death. Jesus did not insulate Himself from His own sufferings and death – that all led to His resurrection and our salvation.

I want to tell you today what a great blessing you are in our parish families, living your faith for the long haul. You are here in the good times and in the tough times. You are an encouragement to fellow parishioners. You are an encouragement to me as you faithfully answer the Lord's question like Simon Peter did: "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."

A man was a very successful director of plays. Lots of aspiring playwrights would send him their manuscripts for his comments. And he always asked the same question before he would agree to reading a draft: "And how is your second act?"

He knew that many writers could get all fired-up about their first act, but then slack-off in what would follow.

"How is your second act?" is another way of saying, "It's not just how we start, but how we finish." "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."

During the Second World War, the Dutch Christian woman, Corrie ten Boom [1892-1983], was arrested by the Nazis and placed in solitary confinement in a concentration camp. She was very discouraged one evening and prayed to God: "If you are really here, show me that you are the light in my darkness."

The next morning, she noticed that there was a line of sunlight coming into her cell through a crack in the concrete wall. And it shone upon a couple of blades of grass in the cell floor. She said that she knew that the Lord was with her, that He was the light in her personal darkness. In the good times and in the tough times, Corrie ten Boom was faithful for the long haul.

We are called and graced to be faithful to the Lord for the long haul. Our daily trust in Jesus, the Bread of Life, has everything to do with how we finish.

Jesus looked at the Twelve and asked them: “Do you also want to leave?”

And we need to make our reply to that question each day with Simon Peter: “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.”

Jesus, I trust in you.