

To whom shall we go?

This Gospel passage we've heard at our Masses last weekend – and will hear more of this Sunday – is from John, Chapter 6, called the Bread of Life discourse: “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:54, NAB.)

If we continue to read this passage, we learn that many of the Lord's disciples could not fathom the idea of “eating flesh, drinking blood” – even as they had witnessed him performing miracles of multiplying food and healing the sick. So, many of them left Jesus. They chose to leave him, and as St. John notes, they “returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied” Jesus (John 6:66.)

After several weeks of what Archbishop Lori called a “tsunami of moral failures” in the Catholic Church, with the Grand Jury report of abuse in the church in Pennsylvania, and the scandal of clerical abuse in other places in our nation and around the world, I imagine there are many within the church at large that, rightly angered, scandalized and confused, have considered leaving it – “no longer accompanying Christ.”

It is a sad, dark day, and yet another occasion to lift up in prayer the many who have been hurt by those with authority in the church. I myself am still processing it all as well. If there is anyone who has been hurt or abused, please go to your parish and talk to the pastor, someone on staff and/or call the Archdiocese of Baltimore for help.

Yet, to briefly borrow a word of encouragement from our good archbishop, in a recent homily directed to our future priests studying at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg:

“Don't get swept up in it. Don't lose your focus. Concentrate on formation, on becoming in God's grace the best priests you can be. Continue developing your life of prayer. Stay close to Jesus in the Eucharist...”

“Like Ezekiel, take your baggage as if into exile, i.e., the Sacrament of Penance. Somewhere in the Gospel Jesus tells us we're better off without our

baggage! Tend to your own evangelization so that one day you will evangelize others. Be first a disciple so that one day you will be a missionary."

While you may not be a future priest, the advice is still most wise and good for all of us: become in God's grace the best you can be; continue developing your life of prayer; stay close to Jesus in the Eucharist. He desires to give us life - particularly now, in these challenging times - through the reception of his body and blood, in this Eucharist. It is the greatest prayer we can offer now for our church and our own very personal intentions because it unites us to his sacrifice on the Cross that saved humanity and conquered sin and death. That was the greatest victory of the world and of history!

There is no sin, no matter how grave, evil and scandalous, even if committed by someone in the hierarchy of the church, that changes this truth. God does not change. Jesus does not change, and the reality of his coming to us with his own very flesh and blood in the Eucharist will never change. That is why we need it so. He wants to strengthen us with himself in this test, this storm. His faithfulness never fails.

In these current times of confusion, doubt, sadness or anger, instead of letting our passions rule us we should come to Jesus in his flesh and blood, in his Eucharist. With Peter, who like many didn't understand, we too say "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68.) In the days ahead, may Jesus give true conversion, healing and purification to our church, and may we as its members be truly strengthened by him - and as a most intentional church be his instruments of reconciliation, renewal and compassion.

Read more at archbalt.org/accountability