

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me; save the servant who trusts in you, my God. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** (Ps 33)

ANTIPHON: Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

RESPONSE: **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

**LECTOR:** I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise always on my lips; in the Lord my soul shall make its boast. The humble shall hear and be glad. **R.**

**LECTOR:** The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth. The Lord turns his eyes to the just and his ears to their appeal. **R.**

**LECTOR:** They call and the Lord hears and rescues them in all their distress. The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save. **R.**

**LECTOR:** Many are the trials of the just man but from them all the Lord will rescue him. He will keep guard over all his bones, not one of his bones shall be broken. **R.**

**LECTOR:** Evil brings death to the wicked; those who hate the good are doomed. The Lord ransoms the souls of his servants. Those who hide in him shall not be condemned. **R.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** Alleluia, alleluia! Your words, Lord, are spirit and life: you have the words of everlasting life. Alleluia!

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) The earth is replete with the fruits of your work, O Lord; you bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer the heart.

**Or**

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, says the Lord, and I will raise him up on the last day.

**TODAY'S READINGS** Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6:60-69

**NEXT WEEK** (22nd Sunday, Year of B) Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; Psalm 14; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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## Staying in the game with God



25 August 2024 21st Sunday Year B

It must have been tough being a disciple of Jesus, an eloquent public speaker, who could sway large crowds with his rhetoric. He healed the sick, cast out demons, stilled a storm at sea, walked on water and raised the dead. Jesus appeared to bear all the hallmarks of the expected Messiah.

And yet, there were times when Jesus said and did things that made him look like he was demented or demon-possessed. At one point in Mark's gospel, as we heard back on the Tenth Sunday of the Year, Jesus' family sought to "restrain him" because people were saying "He has gone out of his mind" (Mk 3:21).

The gospel presents us with another of these episodes where Jesus' claims proved a threat to the cohesion of his team of disciples. Last week, we heard how Jesus said he was "the bread of eternal life" whose "flesh is real food and [whose] blood is real drink" (Jn 6:55), and "anyone who eats [his] flesh and drink [his] blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:54).

This week, we learn that numerous members of Jesus' team found this teaching "intolerable" (Jn 6:60). But, instead of offering an explanation, Jesus chose to up the ante by making an even more outrageous claim about his pre-existence as a being come down from heaven.

The reaction of his teammates was perfectly understandable. Such claims were "intolerable" on purely rationalistic grounds. Jesus refused

to compromise, saying, in effect, "take it or leave it". John tells us that "many" decided to "leave it". They turned aside from their commitment to Jesus; or, as we would say, "they took their ball and went home" (Jn 6:66).

By contrast, when challenged, the Twelve through their spokesperson, Peter, admitted that despite their confusion they were prepared to stick with Jesus, because Jesus alone "had the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). In Peter and the Twelve, we find our models of discipleship – women and men who, despite doubts and dark moments of uncertainty, choose to stay in the game. Faith is not built entirely on reason – although it is far from completely irrational. It is built on a relationship with a personal God whom we have experienced as one who stays in the game with us. And so, like Peter we stay and say back to God, "To whom [else] can we go?" (Jn 6:68)

Every time I read this gospel story, I am reminded of these words from the prayer of Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end... But I know you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

Ian J Elmer

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