

Saturday in the Third Week of Easter
Acts 9:31–42
Psalm 116:12–17
John 6:60–69

Today's interaction between Jesus and Peter displays such tenderness and transparency, both on the part of Jesus and Peter. After the defection of so many of Jesus' disciples he then asks the Twelve:

Do you also wish to go away?

This question is filled with meaning. For here the Lord shows just how clearly he respects our freewill. He will not force and demand anyone stay with him because he so respects our innate dignity. To have human dignity means that the Lord will honour our wishes, but he will not water down what he has to say in order to persuade people to stay with him. There is no manipulation or coercion in the Lord's missionary method. This is because, as John says in chapter 1, Jesus is full of grace and truth. Because he is full of grace, he is the true respecter of human freedom. Because he is full of truth, he will say things that so unsettle people that many will say:

This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?

St John Paul II said something that is displayed by Jesus here:

"The Church can only propose, she can never impose"

This is clearly what Jesus is doing here. He proposes to his listeners the truth about the Eucharist. But at no time does he impose this teaching on his listeners, demanding that they accept it.

This is an important lesson for us to consider. In our lives we are invited to examine our own conscience and ask: "In what ways do I find the Lord's teaching difficult?"

The teaching of Jesus is such that if we listen to it carefully he always invites us to deeper conversion. It can conversely result in a distancing of ourselves from our Lord if we choose to reject what he says.

This also finds expression in the lives of our teenage and adult children. As they grew up they were catechized in the faith. But as they reach their teen years and young adulthood they may have concluded:

This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?

If this is your experience, hear in the tone of Jesus, a sadness and a longing when he asks the question:

"Do you also wish to go away?"

Dear friends, when it comes right down to it we cannot coerce anyone, especially adult children, into following Jesus Christ. We can of course continue to pray for them and ask the Lord to open their hearts and minds to his grace-filled, truth filled teaching.

Where we have the greatest influence is in our own lives. How can we be open to a deepening conversion day by day? Peter's response to Jesus is very instructive in helping to answer this question:

Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Here Peter states a fact, that Jesus has the words of eternal life. He knows that Jesus' words are of such importance that they will teach us how to live in this world with the eternal perspective of heaven. It is for this reason that St. John begins his Gospel by saying: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us". The Word, who in Genesis One, is the creative personal presence that brings creation into being, is the same word that in John's Gospel is the personal presence that recreates our lives so that they gain an eternal perspective on life.

This fact that Jesus has the words of eternal life is then joined to a statement Peter makes about the nature of conversion. "We have come to believe and know". These two verbs, "know" and "believe" are very important. To know what Jesus says is one thing. All who heard Jesus that day in the Capernaum Synagogue knew what he said, but most of them did not believe him. Conversion is that ongoing process whereby as we know the teaching of Jesus we believe more fully what he says so that we can apply it to our lives. The application in this particular instance is stated when Peter says "You are the Son of God".

As Christians, the whole of our life on earth is to be spent living out this verse. As we do this we will discover more fully the purposeful, awe-filled life that is eternal life. A life that while starting now will go on forever.

Let me end by referring to the wise council of St. John Paul II

Make a particular effort to seek Jesus and attain a deep personal faith which influences and directs your whole life; but above all may your commitments and plans consist in loving Jesus, with a sincere, genuine and personal love. He should be your friend and your support along the way of life. He alone has the words of eternal

