

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost John 6:51-69

This is a hard saying, some said, as we heard it, when they heard what our Lord Jesus said; who can listen to this?

But what is really so offensive about what our Lord Jesus said? Well, different things to different people. There are different levels of offence, different levels of rejection, and different reasons why some reject His Word. There was that then; there is that today. also.

Clearly, the notion of eating His flesh and blood is somewhat offensive in itself, already at the outset. We generally do not like to eat pieces of people, or drink their blood; we are really not supposed to, either. So how can we not react with disgust? Unless we have come to believe and know and understand in faith that our Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; then we will also understand that He speaks of the heavenly things; that His body and blood are His *heavenly* body and blood, born of His blessed mother, and crucified and buried and raised anew and ascended again into the heavenly glory from which He came to be made flesh for our salvation; and that it is as such that His body and blood are given to us, in, with, and under bread and wine.

And this means that we can receive His gifts without disgust. For they are given to us without the cannibalistic connotations that would otherwise come with eating human flesh and blood, even though they are indeed His *actual* body and blood, actually given to us, and for real, in His festive meal of salvation.

Those, however, who *went back*, as we hear it today, and *walked with Him no more*, they were offended for other reasons. As we hear it today that Holy Scripture says it of them, *He knew from the beginning who they, were who did not believe, and who would betray Him*; and this it says, although Holy Scripture also refers to them as *His disciples*. They were not among the twelve; nor were they among those to whom our Lord Jesus refers at so many times in the Gospel according to Saint John as *those whom the Father had given to Him*. Well, some of them might have been, and then they must later have repented of their unbelief and returned to Him in faith, perhaps much later, but before they died. But for now, they were Jews who only followed Him until they learned what He is really all about, and were offended by what He is really all about, so that they would no longer know of Him.

It happens also today; many of those who will not know of Him for who He really is, and are offended at what He is really all about, will still continue to claim that they are His disciples, and Christian, and convince themselves that it is from Him they have learnt what they believe, even though what they believe is what they have learnt from the godless world, and from human nature, and what they have convinced themselves must be what He *really* meant and really wanted to teach, even though it is so often the exact opposite of what He actually said and taught.

Many are offended at the same things as were those Jews who followed Him for a while; that of which we hear today that He said: *As the living Father sent Me, and I live through the Father, so will he who feeds on me live because of me.* Many are offended at His claim that only in Him is salvation and eternal life, and that those who will not embrace Him as the only salvation available to sinners will perish on account of their unbelief and rejection of Him, and of the love of God, which has come to sinners in Him; that, as we hear it today that He said it, and with an oath: *Most assuredly, or rather, as it is in the original Greek: Amen! Amen! I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.*

This, of course, does *not* mean that some of those who believe in Him and seek their salvation in His love and what His love has done for sinners in His sufferings death will still be condemned if, for some reason or another, they were not able to have His body and blood given to them in His festive meal of salvation, or were not able to have it given to them often enough; rather, it means that *they* will, who *refuse* to receive His body and blood because they reject Him altogether and refuse to receive the salvation of God in Him.

Does this offend you?, we hear today that our Lord Jesus asked. *What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?* In other words, what offended them were not only the specific teachings they heard then and there; rather, His Word of salvation was offensive to them altogether, that He is the Son of God who had come down from Heaven and would return, all for the salvation of those who would receive Him. They rejected His salvation altogether, because it is offensive to human nature, which cannot and will not allow for God to be that good, and cannot and will not admit to have to receive all things good out of His goodness alone.

It is of this our Lord Jesus spoke, when He said that *it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.*

With this He was not referring to His own flesh, given to sinners in His festive meal of salvation; rather, He was referring to human nature, which will always reject His salvation, until and unless it is overcome by His love, which comes to us, with His Holy Spirit, in His Word of His love and what His love has done for us. As we hear it today that He said it: *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life.*

In Greek the word for *spirit* is also the word for *breath*, as also in Hebrew. Yes. In Holy Scripture, the *Spirit of God* is the *breath of God*, His very own life, and His innermost self, whom, with His Word, God breathes into those who hear, and who makes us to come alive to God. It is of this we hear today: only when He breathes His own life into us, with His Word of life, will sinners come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance and doubt so as to believe in Him and surrender to His love and seek our salvation in Him. And then His salvation is ours. As it is said in the beginning of the Gospel according to Saint John: *To those who received Him He gave the right to become children of God, to all who believed in His name: and they were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God.* And those in whom this happens will, and must, surrender to His love and submit to His Word. What else can we do? As we hear it today that Peter said it when our Lord Jesus asked the twelve if they also would go away: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

There is much that is difficult about being a Christian and living in His love, under His Word. His love calls us into a life of doing much that we do not want to do, and of *not* doing much that we do want to do. His Word confronts us with our constant failure and our faults and flaws. His Word teaches so much that we do not understand, and which does not make sense to us, such as that His body and blood are really given to us with bread and wine in His festive meal of salvation. It teaches so much that seems wrong to us, and hard to hear, such as that so many must perish and suffer forever in His judgement because they reject His salvation and will not know of the greatest love of all.

Nevertheless, once we have come to believe and know that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that He alone has the words of eternal life, what can we do other than continue to seek our salvation in Him and submit to His Word? Where else could we go?

There is nowhere else we could go where it would be good for us to be. As God had said it to His Prophet Jeremiah already ages ago: *Should they ask you: 'Where shall we go?', then say to them: 'Thus says the Lord: 'Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity.'*

He has the words of eternal life. The words He speaks are Spirit and life; with His Word the Spirit of God is given to us, and His own heavenly life.

And for those who come to believe and know in faith that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the hard sayings we hear today, which sinful nature cannot abide to hear, well, they become precious promises of life and salvation: *The bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.* He would give His body up to be crucified for the sin of the world, and be Himself cursed and condemned for the sin of the world. And with that, He would pay the price and penalty for the sin of all sinners, in our stead and on our behalf, and win for us full and complete forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings, and full and complete righteousness before His judgement.

And now He gives to His Christians that which He gave for us. From His seat in heavenly glory He makes His body and blood one with bread and wine, by the power of His Word, and has it given to us to eat and drink, so that we may know that what He gave was given for me, just as it is given to me. And with it He gives His salvation to us anew, ever anew, and Himself, and makes us one with Him in all that He is and all that is His. *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, as we hear it today that He said it, and I in him.*

With His body and blood as well as with His Word He lives in us with His Holy Spirit and His own life, and includes us in that life which He shared with the Father from eternity. As He said it, as we hear it: *As the living Father sent me, and I live through the Father, so he who feeds on me will live through me.* And His life is eternal life, the fullness of life in His goodness and His glory, which shall never end. As we also hear it: *I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And: Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Now, to Him, whose power works in us and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, be glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.