

**MASTER, WHO SHALL WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE - Biblical  
Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Jn 6.60-69***

***At that time, many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."***

***As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "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."***

The evangelist is bitterly highlighting the failure of the long lecture delivered by Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, which was entirely focused on Eucharist.

Jesus was ridiculed by religious authorities who don't understand how this man could speak about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, but he was not understood even by disciples.

The evangelist writes that *"many of his disciples who were listening said, 'This saying is hard'"*. The word translated with 'hard' is the Greek term 'skleros' (skleros), which means 'what is insolent, outrageous'. Which is this hard saying?

First of all, Jesus detaching from ancestors' traditions; as disciples follow the ancestors of Israel, Jesus urges to follow the Father, and they – while following Jesus for their ambitions, wishing he became the king of people – understood that in order to follow Jesus they have to turn themselves into a gift for others, just like Jesus does. Therefore 'hard' means 'unacceptable'.

So they are murmuring against him, as Jews did, as the crowd did. Now even disciples are murmuring against Jesus.

Jesus states *“Does this shock you?”* The true shock is the death of the Messiah. They cannot accept a Messiah who goes towards death. And Jesus says *“what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?”* Death is considered as a descent in the kingdom of dead and Resurrection is an ascent. In order to ‘go up’ one has to pass through death; Jesus passes through the most outrageous and slanderous death, crucifixion, the one reserved to the damned.

Here comes a key and precious indication that Jesus provides, and evangelist underlines, about the meaning of Eucharist. *“It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail.”* What does Jesus mean by that? Eating bread – the meaning of Eucharist, the flesh - without turning oneself into bread for others is useless. Participating to an Eucharist in which the love one receives is not transformed in love conveyed, is absolutely of no avail.

But he assures *“the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life”*. Whoever welcomes this bread and turns himself into bread for others, discovers in him the generative power of these words that burst with vital energy.

*“But there are some of you who do not believe”*, he adds. Jesus failed, many think that his saying is hard, many don’t believe; he even goes on saying *“among them there was one who would betray him”*. It’s a complete failure. But Jesus doesn’t want to change his plans, he incites his disciples, instead. As a matter of fact *“many of them returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him”*. Jesus doesn’t run after them, he prefers to remain alone rather than changing his plans, but he incites them and says to the Twelve *“Do you also want to leave?”* They are following Jesus just for their advantage, for their needs and didn’t understand that, in order to follow Jesus, one has to direct his life towards needs and good of others.

*“Simon Peter answered him”* – please remember that this disciple’s name is Simon; Peter is a nickname that evangelists use when he opposes Jesus. When he is cited both with name and nickname, it means that he partially agrees with Jesus and partially not – *“Master, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life”*.

Well Peter, Simon, understood that the words of Jesus, that became flesh in his person, are the ones that convey a quality of life which is able to overcome death. But, here comes the negative part *“We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God”*.

The Holy One of God is an expression indicating the Messiah of tradition who appeared several times in Gospels, always in negative contexts, in Mark and Luke, said by unclean spirits or demons to the Messiah awaited by people, the one who was meant to restore monarchy, dominate pagans and, first of all, obey and impose the Law.

This is the kind of Messiah Peter is wishing for and will be the reason for his betrayal.