

21 Sunday B

August 22, 2021

St. Patrick

For the recent four Sundays the Gospel of St. John has taught us about Jesus as our Bread of Life. This Sunday the Gospel is blunt, holding nothing back. It tells us, **“Many of Jesus’ disciples turned back, and no longer went about with him.”** Yes, they gave up on Jesus. They took a different path.

Jesus teaches them—and us this Sunday—clearly: **“Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”**

Immediately, many complained and grumbled after Jesus taught that. **“This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”**

Many couldn’t accept Jesus or his teaching. They gave up on him and started looking elsewhere.

Friends: In these last eighteen months of this pandemic, many of our longtime parishioners at St. Patrick’s have died. It’s a long litany of cherished, loved members who have passed over into eternity—some of the names include Lucinda, Laney, Phyllis, Blanche, Al, Eddie, Astrid, Ron, Anthony, Bernice, Floyd. Only one of them has died from COVID-19. I have a hunch, however, that the months of isolation and worry took a toll on many of them, and may have contributed to their deaths.

This Tuesday we’ll bury a member of more than sixty years, Allen Stiles. Not only on Sundays, but each weekday Mass Allen came and participated. He took the bus. You may not know, but in the pandemic, no more than ten riders could be on the bus. Allen told me that he sometimes waited until a third bus passed that had fewer than ten riders, and he could get on the bus. Sometimes he had to walk here, or home.

Allen and our other veteran parishioners total more than 408 years as part of St. Patrick’s. They have gone to the Lord, having been formed on this promise of Jesus in chapter six of St. John’s Gospel: **“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”**

Yes, they have given their “Amen” each time they shared in the Body of Christ here at the Eucharist.

Months ago, the one parishioner who died of COVID, I visited her ICU room two days before she died. The nursing staff had me thoroughly dressed and protected. When I entered the room, I told her who I was, speaking loudly due to her hearing loss. With all the protective stuff on, she couldn’t recognize me, and informed me, “I go to St. Patrick’s, and Father Val is my priest!” Eventually she got that *I* was he! We prayed together. When I gave her Holy Communion, a small portion of the consecrated bread due to her weakness, I said, “Beverly, the Body of Christ.” She then told me, “Communion at St. Patrick’s is round.” I explained why I gave her a tiny part of the consecrated bread. She then said clearly, “Amen!” Less than two days later, she died.

Yes, it is *our* Good Shepherd who places himself as a simple piece of broken bread into the hands of those whose spirit groans and aches for a deeper meaning in life (1).

In his time, however, many gave up on Jesus.

“Do you also want to leave?”—still agitating, Jesus asks *us* the question.

Simon Peter made his choice: **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...”**

“To whom shall we go?” Yes, Friends, it’s always a person, not a doctrine, which keeps us within communion with our forebears...and with Jesus.

Let the church say, “Amen!”

(1) See Michael Simone, S.J., “The True Bread,” in America (August 20, 2018), pg. 50.

General Intercessions

August 22, 2021

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Grace us to feed on Jesus as our Bread of Life, that we might walk with him as his faith-filled disciples; we pray to you, O Lord—

Instill love and fidelity within Deacon Eugene Champion and Anna, and Deacon Frank Williams and Bambi, during their retreat this weekend; and lead our deacon candidates in the diocese in their formation; we pray to you, O Lord—

Inspire all of us to show care in safeguarding others from the Delta variant; and give healing to all who suffer from the pandemic; we pray to you, O Lord—

Hold up those who are suffering in Haiti and in Afghanistan; we pray to you, O Lord—

Help us to secure immigration policies that reflect your compassion and justice; we pray to you, O Lord—

Fulfill the desire for eternal life in all who have died with hope, especially those who have died from the coronavirus; (and, during the 8:30 a.m. Mass only--) and, Aquilea Duenas, on her second

anniversary; and Pascual Hernandez Fermin, on his tenth anniversary; we pray to you, O Lord—