

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday Ord. Time (B)  
St. Athanasius Parish and Family Reunion  
August 22, 23, 2015

When I was growing up in the northend of Dubuque, the most common card game was euchre. Actually, it was really the only card game I could play. The goal was to hold as many 'trump cards' as possible so you could take as many tricks as possible. I want to begin today's homily by playing a 'trump card' .... but not as in euchre. Today it is 'the Donald Trump card'.

As we complete our hearing of the great Bread of Life discourse from St. John's gospel, I could not help recall Donald Trump's conversation about his faith life during a recent visit to Iowa. He was asked whether or not he had ever asked God for forgiveness. He said,

"I'm not sure that I have. I just go on and try to do a better job from there. I don't think so. I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try and make it right. I don't bring God into that picture. I don't. When we go into church, when I drink my little wine – which is about the only wine I drink – and have my little cracker, I guess that is a form of asking for forgiveness, and I do that as often as possible because I feel cleansed."

"Drink my little wine, and have my little cracker" .... cute line if you want to make light of receiving Holy Communion. But after five weeks of St. John's teaching, I hope all of us here are well beyond 'making light of the Eucharist'. In today's gospel the people following Jesus are clearly not making light of what he was saying. They were listening very intently, and they were getting the point of his teaching. They did not find it easy to accept, however. As we hear today, they were beginning to leave. Manna, bread, even bread from heaven ... fine. But 'flesh' and 'blood'? That was way too much for many of them. The disciples are concerned that the crowds are leaving, and they more or less ask Jesus to stop the teaching, or at least to soften the message. But as we hear, Jesus says to them .... do you also want to leave? And then Peter says, "But to whom else would we go ... you have the words of eternal life!" That is where you and I need to get in our own convictions about Jesus and in our own commitments to Jesus. To whom else would we go? The question is, "how far along the journey to that conviction and that commitment am I now, at this point in my life?"

Around the time of Vatican Council II, when our understanding of God, Church, and all of Scripture was being renewed, one of the newer understandings about grace, sin, and our personal faith was that of 'fundamental option'. The teaching of 'fundamental option' is too much to explain here. The fact is that the teaching has been misunderstood and misused by many, and in his first encyclical letter about one year ago, Pope Francis discussed the teaching, and while acknowledging that it has some valid points, he did condemn its misuse. The valid point of the teaching is that after I make a 'fundamental option' for God, the rest of my decisions, both daily and long-term, are easier to make

because I have already decided to live for God. The misuse comes in when I say “I have made a fundamental option for God”, and so my little and even big sins don’t really matter. I have made a fundamental option for God. One of the best analogies for this is maybe ‘marriage vows’: once I say to someone that “I will love you and honor you all the days of my life”, that really eliminates for me everyone else from that level of commitment. And, that vow to love and honor you all the days of my life determines the rest of my actions. Lying to you, is not loving and honoring you. Disrespecting you in any way is not loving and honoring you.

In the same way, Jesus was seeking a ‘fundamental option’ from those who were following him. He wanted them to choose or opt for His Father and His Father's Kingdom. He wanted them to choose this and then live the rest of their lives based on that choice and option. And Peter, at least, seemed to be getting to that point, when he said “Lord, to whom else would 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.” Once I believe that, and **ONLY** once I believe that, will I be able to welcome the other teachings of Jesus into my heart and my life. Only when I believe that Jesus is the one who possesses and makes eternal life available to me, will some of the harder teachings of his message take root in me and guide my life. Only then also, will I be able to live with some of the harder teachings of the Church of Jesus as well. And since these are more specific and the ones we experience more directly, they may well be the harder to accept.

Staying with Jesus is always a decision, and it begins with a level of trust. I don't need to understand everything at first, and there are some things about God that I will never understand. But I trust enough to stay, and grow into deeper belief and knowledge. None of us understood everything that our parents asked of us at the time. But if we trusted their love for us, and trusted that they lived and did things for our good, we were able to deal more easily with their more difficult decisions and bits of advice.

What are your struggles in coming to terms with particular teachings of Jesus?  
Do you really believe the bread you eat and the cup from which you drink is indeed  
the Body and Blood of Jesus? And do you believe that you need this for  
eternal life?

Is your situation in life currently impacted by some of the more specific teachings of  
Jesus' Church? Is your trust level sufficient to help you hang in there and come to  
some deeper acceptance and understanding, and even deep enough for you to help  
advance the Church of Jesus in a more pastoral direction?

Our fundamental option for Jesus helps us to face these kinds of situations. If we leave the company of Jesus and the community of his disciples, we separate ourselves from the very support that we need. Pray to be able to say with Peter, “Lord to whom else would we go? We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”