

**Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17. 18b**

**Psalm 34**

**Ephesians 5:21-32**

**John 6:60-69**

**Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek**

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With today's Gospel, our reading of John's bread of life discourse comes to an end. We began five weeks ago reading about the multiplication of loaves and feeding of the crowd on the mountain. That crowd then followed Jesus to Capernaum where he urged them to work for food that brings eternal life, and added, "I am the bread of life." A week later we heard the crowd doubting Jesus. "Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Last week, we heard the Jews quarreling among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And today we heard that many left Jesus, returning to their former ways of life. We experienced this discourse over a five week-period, but it most likely all took place in just two days – one day on the mountain with Jesus feeding the crowd, and a second day in Capernaum with that same crowd questioning and doubting Jesus, quarreling among themselves about him, and finally abandoning him. From a crowd of over five thousand, Jesus was left with only a few. Those who abandoned Jesus said his message was hard. "Who can accept it?" But just what was it that was so hard about the words of Jesus? It is commonly believed that the Jews were disgusted by the notion of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood. That may well be, but I suspect there was more to it than that. They must have also felt overwhelmed by the idea of God being so close to them – being one of them, in the flesh, as a humble and vulnerable servant. Jesus sensed their anxiety when he asked, "Does this shock you? What if you

were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" Though Simon Peter often put his foot in his mouth when he spoke, he ended this bread of life discourse with great eloquence and understanding when Jesus asked, "Do you also want to go?" and Simon answered, "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 great attrition of the crowd over this two-day period calls to mind a basic human weakness that is still with us today. The people on the mountain were enamored by the teachings of Jesus, by his healings, and by his miracles, or signs, especially the multiplication of loaves. Their excitement grew, and they followed him to Capernaum yearning for more. But as his message got harder, enthusiasm waned, and many left Jesus. How often have we started some new endeavor with great enthusiasm, only to have our interest wane as the effort got harder, until we finally gave it up. It is not easy to keep going as the journey gets harder. I have learned that many times in my life, once as a high school freshman. I begged my parents to let me go out for football, and they finally agreed. At one of the practices early in my tenure, I watched a hitting drill, and was obviously stunned by the ferocity of the hits. One of the coaches looked at me and said, "Mocek, your eyes are as big as saucers, and I could drive a Mack truck into your mouth." Not long after that I decided football was not my sport, and I gave it up. Some of you may have had similar experiences, if not in athletics, in other challenging endeavors – in music or dance, in school, on a job, in a relationship, or even in your religion.

As happened with the crowd following Jesus, the journey of any worthwhile

venture can become hard from time to time. When that happens, we either persevere, or we give it up. Right or wrong, giving up has its consequences, especially in our culture today. We do not tolerate quitting very well. Though dropping out of football was the right decision for me, it cost me a little popularity among some of my classmates. Consequences can be much more severe, however, like broken friendships, disrupted families, or separation from one's church. We can become very judgmental and hypocritical when someone decides, for whatever reason, to throw in the towel. But note how Jesus responded as the crowd left him. He did not call them out. He did not pursue them. He did not condemn them. He simply turned to the twelve and asked, "Do you also want to leave?" What a model that is for us to consider whenever a friend, a co-worker, or a loved one encounters tough times and faces a decision to either persevere or give it up. In those difficult times, maybe we should follow Jesus and offer love rather than judgement; respect rather than criticism; support rather than direction.