

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today's Gospel, as the end of the Bread of Life Discourse ends in a disturbing way: in John 6:66 it says that **“As a result of this [Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist], many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.”** Did you catch that? This is saying that Jesus' teaching about His gift of His Body and Blood was too hard for people to accept, and so many people left Him. Jesus does not then run after them to bring them back, or tell them they misunderstood – no, they understood His meaning, that they must really eat His Flesh and drink His Blood. Rather, Jesus turns to the twelve disciples and invites them to leave, too.

This passage shows us that sometimes the things of Faith are indeed **hard to accept**. It also shows us that, while we are called to be loving in our teaching and sharing the Faith, we are not to water down our Faith just so people will follow. Jesus shows us that *rejecting* the Truth about Him is better than *accepting* a lie or half-truth.

As I have said before, the Eucharist is the heart and center of our Faith, and it is especially here that we need to be clear. This Truth that Jesus truly gives us His Body and Blood to eat and drink – not in symbol, but in reality – can be hard, and has implications for our lives. For instance, in I Corinthians, St. Paul states that we must be aware of this great mystery and prepare ourselves to receive Him, or else the consequences could be severe:

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. (I Corinthians 11:27-30)

This is important to note – that if we receive the Eucharist with unrepentant sin on our souls (“unworthily”) or without an understanding of who we receive (“without discerning the body”), the Bread of Life becomes for us the *bread of death* (“many... are ill and infirm, and ... are dying”).

You may be shocked at what you just read and say, “How dare Fr. Von say that!” I would never be so bold as to make this claim; it is St. Paul in the inspired Scripture that says this – God Himself says this. This is why the Church constantly teaches that you need to be Catholic, and have an understanding of the Eucharist to come to receive – not because we're an exclusive club that is trying to keep people out, but that we want **to protect** people from receiving without “discerning the body” and so receiving the *bread of death*. This is why the Church constantly has taught that if people have serious sin on their souls, they should not go to Communion without going to Confession first – not because we're keeping something from people, as if to say, “you're not *worthy* to be among us!” Rather, the Church wants **to protect** her children from receiving the *bread of death*.

Do not let this frighten you, though. God is supremely merciful; He longs to call all of us back to His Heart. The Church is not a museum of saints, but a hospital for sinners. We don't wait to receive Communion until we're *worthy*, but rather, we turn to Jesus, go to be healed of our serious sins in the soul doctor's office (in Confession), and cry out “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed” ... and He *will* heal us, making us worthy of His grace.

May we not turn away from Jesus in His hard teaching on the Eucharist, but rather cling to Him and say with St. Peter, **“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”** (John 6:68-69).