

## St Pius & St Anthony 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

We've all had experiences that may have tempted us to feel discouraged or disappointed. We don't have to live too long here on earth to eventually have the experience of being led on and then be let down. In today's gospel, we don't hear anything about how He personally processed (or felt inside) being rejected and left, by not, just the 'crowds' complaining over His teaching and turning away, but 'many of his disciples' (Jn 6:66) too, 'leaving and returning to their previous way of life'. We know we have the most compassionate Savior in Jesus, as Hebrews 4:15 tells us "we have a high priest who is **able to sympathize with our weakness ,.....tested in every way, yet without sin**". Jesus feels deeply our experiences with us. So, I naturally wonder how He worked through in His own heart, the emotions of this potentially devastating discouragement/deflation of having disciple-friends walking away from Him. Something about this scene calls to my mind the picture image of little Linus standing in the pumpkin patch in the Charlie Brown movie ('The Great Pumpkin') after Charlie and all the gang leave him to go trick or treating, and only Sally stays with him, hanging on because she was sweet on him, and then she too has enough, and takes off upset leaving Linus all alone in the night waiting and waiting on the Great Pumpkin by himself. I find this scene of Jesus picturing Him so vulnerable. I sense Him feeling it, in His own words, when he (point blank) asks the Twelve, "Do **you** also want to leave?" (Jn 6:67). I find a parallel to this scene from John also in Matthew's gospel when Jesus asks His apostles, "Who do **you** say I am?" It was a decision point in the relationship, a moment of definition, of determining, exactly where do we stand with each other, like in a very close relationship when the delicate question arises, and someone asks, "What do I mean to you?"

To jump ahead and give the answer, in both of these cases, Peter steps up and speaks for the Twelve (John 6 & Matt 16). In Matthew 16:18 Peter says "You are the Christ"-the anointed one that we have been waiting for! And here in John 6, Peter says, "You are it for us Jesus- to whom else would we go? All our hope is in you!"

But back to what I'm focusing on here, is the feeling in Jesus' heart when even '**some of his own**' turn on Him, and walk away from Him. What a tempting moment of discouragement that must have been for Him? His own 'once' disciples turn on him – how potentially devastating! Yes way back early in the gospel, His own home town synagogue Nazareth (Luke 4) rejected him, but that was when He was just getting started in ministry. Now these are some disciples have been in the trench with Him a while- a lot has happened to them together, and these 'brothers in arms' now leave and go off. How might that have affected

Him? I think it is natural to wonder this, and *in fact I love Jesus more* because of imagining Him here going through with us, the full human range of human emotions and experiences.

As a little heart exercise for ourselves, we can think for a minute of our own last disappointment or discouragement. Of course, ours are nothing in comparison to the weight of Christ's burdens, but such a recollection of our disappointments can help us appreciate His position and fidelity to us, better. (Because isn't the greatest human complaint of despair expressed when we say, 'Nobody gets me-no one understands me' Well, yes, Jesus does. Right here!)

So, maybe our last discouragement or personal letdown was when someone you counted on, didn't show up or maybe they walked out at a most critical moment. We do not have to get too personal, so some safe examples might be of when were let down by 'public figures', maybe a sports hero who we idolized, and excelled so well on the field, but then crashed in their personal life to reveal tragic corruption' than can bring such discouragement; or a civic leader who promised so much, but whose talk and actions change over time, until we don't even recognize them anymore (saying that is not who I signed on with). Or I'm big fan of music, and growing up I know I went through several fallouts with bands/artists, who changed genres or 'evolved' (of course I say they, 'devolved'- by the way, DEVO was great band). After 'evolving' they just weren't putting out good music anymore (think of the classic example of when Bob Dylan went from using only 'acoustic instruments', to 'electric', then his 'pure folk' followers revolted.) My disappointment came from rock band Pink Floyd, when they let Roger Waters walk away. Without him, the name Pink Floyd - it ends there. As lead singer and lyricist, he was Pink Floyd's artistic soul. (*Classic Floyd of albums of 'Dark side of Moon', 'Wish you were here and of course, 'The Wall' ended with the 'Final Cut' when Waters left—the band then went to pasture in 'Muzak'*) Or maybe we've had the letdown of a favorite restaurant that changes its menu, and our best comfort dish is removed (Why?). All discouragements, again not anything like the heavy weight of what Jesus struggles through, but still they stir up within us that feeling of being let down and disappointed. **But we are not alone**, Jesus is right beside us as we see Him move through His major 'let-down' being rejected by His own disciples. (Maybe this was training day for Him, getting ready for when He will be abandoned at His arrest and they will all run off? Or on the cross as He cries out with the pain of abandonment? I have conducted this little 'heart exercise' reviewing our discouragements for the purpose of having us empathize with Jesus' feeling, and moving us to recommit ourselves to Him. While we may not turn away from Jesus over His 'Real Presence' Eucharistic teaching (that we

truly receive His Body & Blood in Holy Communion), as the disciples leave him over in the gospel today. They just can't stomach His words about 'feeding them' with His own life-His flesh and blood sacrificed for them. Yet, might we struggle with some other of His teaching. We are here to celebrate Mass with Jesus, so our presence indicates our being good with His 'words of Spirit and Life (John 6:63). So, while we accept His 'real presence' sacramentally here, there may be other words of His that hesitate upon practicing. Maybe when Jesus teaches us to 'Love enemies' (even those actively hurting you-Matt 5:44), or to 'deny ourselves & take up our cross' -Matt 16:24), or to 'forgive seventy times seven our offenders' (even those who haven't asked for it yet-Matt 18:22) or even 'Give to all who ask' (even those we think are undeserving-Matt 5:42). These teachings of Jesus may be more difficult for us to accept than His real presence in the Holy Eucharist, yet witnessing those who leave Jesus behind, can move us to recommit (like Joshua in the first reading) ourselves to more faithfully following Him. Again, as Peter said, "Jesus alone has the words of everlasting life!"