

**Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – August 26, 2018**  
**Reverend Robert W. Marshall, Jr., Pastor**

As I have shared with you before, I am a baseball fan – specifically, a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals. Like all Cardinal fans, Busch Stadium is one of my favorite places on earth – baseball heaven, we call it. But I also enjoy seeing other baseball parks. In recent years I have been to Wrigley Field in Chicago and To Great American Park in Cincinnati. Some years before that, I made a trip to one of the most historic sites in all of baseball – Yankee Stadium, the house that Ruth built – this was before they rebuilt it across the street. I enjoyed the game, but the experience of watching baseball in New York was much different than it is in St. Louis. Cardinal fans are serious – we’re there for the first pitch and we don’t usually leave until the last out. We know who’s on the field and we’re likely to discuss the team, the season, the recent trades with whomever is sitting next to us. Win or lose, St. Louisans just plain love baseball. I’m not sure you can say the same for New Yorkers. When the game began the stadium was, at best, half full. Oh, the Yankee fans were dressed for the occasion – there were plenty of caps and pin stripes to go around. But they seemed more interested in what was going on in the stands than they did in the game. They were focused more on food and beverages than on balls and strikes. The stadium wasn’t really full until the third or fourth inning – as it turns out, long after the major excitement of the game had occurred. And then the fans left by the eighth inning. They didn’t seem interested in finding out if the Yankees could hold on to their lead. Unlike St. Louisans, the New Yorkers didn’t seem to love baseball – arriving late, leaving early, not paying attention – you’d think they were coming to Mass.

As difficult as it is for us to imagine, it wasn’t all that different for Jesus. After he told the crowd that in order to gain eternal life they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, many simply walked away. Maybe they couldn’t handle the implications of his teaching. Maybe they refused to wrap their brains around the whole “flesh and blood” concept. Maybe they just couldn’t be bothered. They had sought Jesus when he fed thousands with just a few loaves and fish. They rushed to him when miracles abounded and things looked easy. But when the message required real commitment, when they had to surrender their pre-conceived notions in order to accept Jesus’ flesh as real food and his blood as real drink – they walked away, returning – the gospel tells us – to their former way of life. As we have noted over these last few weeks, they didn’t mind getting something for nothing, but when Jesus offered them something they weren’t expecting, asked them to accept him as their sustenance – well, that was more of a commitment than these disciples were willing to make. Even the Twelve were having trouble with

this teaching. Jesus asked them if they too were going to walk away. But Simon Peter responded for the group, “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.”

This same drama is carried out week after week in many churches, in many homes, and perhaps even in our own lives. Last week’s gospel invited us to focus on the enormity of Jesus’ gift. In offering to feed us with his body and blood, he is offering us his very self, his total self. This week, we are reminded that accepting the offer of Jesus himself means that – to some extent – we must deny ourselves, allow Jesus to shine and ourselves to fade. And therein lies the problem. We’re committed to the faith when things are easy, but when things get difficult, when our lives are impacted, then it becomes easy to walk away – to return to our former ways of life. Maybe we drift away from prayer or from spiritual reading or from works of charity or from the Eucharist. Maybe we return to centering our life on our career or our social standing or any of the other things our society respects. And so we walk away – perhaps without even thinking about it. We are truly committed to our faith one day but find ourselves less committed as each day passes until suddenly our faith has no impact upon us at all. We may still go through the some of the motions of being Catholic – just like the New Yorkers seem to go through the motions of being baseball fans – but at our core, in our heart, the faith has all but left us.

We are the ones, therefore, who need to hear Simon Peter’s question: “Master, to whom shall we go?” You see, during this difficult time when we have lost confidence in many of our Church’s leaders, we can make the mistake of turning our backs on Jesus Himself. God, I assure you, is just as troubled by what has happened as we are. Placing something or someone else at the center of our lives is not the answer. Christ alone is the answer. We cannot separate ourselves from the Eucharist, from the Body and Blood of Christ. We can – and must – insist on radical change in the Church, on a focus upon holiness, and not self-righteousness. We need to be a part of the solution to this terrible situation. We cannot reject God because too many of his servants were and are unworthy disciples. Simon Peter understood that no matter how difficult Jesus’ message became, Jesus himself was their only hope. Every human person, everyone else, everything else will – sooner or later – disappoint us. Only Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life, only God can satisfy our deepest longing. The road of faith may be difficult, it may require more of us than we are ready to give, but in the end, there is no other road.