

# QUO VADIS

## SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION



**“DO NOT SAY, ‘I AM ONLY A YOUTH’; FOR TO ALL TO WHOM I SEND YOU YOU SHALL GO, AND WHATEVER I COMMAND YOU SHALL SPEAK.”**

**Jeremiah 1:6**

### THE BEAUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

By Mary Clare Piccynski

Today there are many different views of what importance baptism plays in the believer’s life. Questions often arise such as “what exactly is baptism and what does it do” “why is baptism so important” and “why baptize infants.” These questions give us a springboard to delve into the sacrament of baptism and help us understand more about this beautiful sacrament of Christian initiation.

Before we begin examining the sacrament of baptism in depth let’s look at the big picture of the sacraments. There are 7 sacraments in the Catholic Church and these sacraments are efficacious (they do what they symbolize) signs of grace that were instituted by Christ to give divine life to Christians (Catechism of the Catholic Church-subsequently

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referred to as CCC-paragraph 1131). The sacraments can be broken into 3 main categories, the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist), the sacraments of healing (Penance and Anointing of the Sick) and mission (Marriage and Holy Orders). The sacraments of initiation, which we will be examining in this newsletter, “lay the

# POPE QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**“Holy Baptism holds the first place among the sacraments, because it is the door of the spiritual life; for by it we are made members of Christ and incorporated with the Church.”**

**Pope Eugenius IV  
*Exultate Deo***

*foundations* of every Christian life” (CCC 1212) in order to “give birth and increase...to the Christian’s life of faith.” (CCC 1210) Now that we have more of an understanding in what the sacraments are in general let us learn more about Baptism which is the “basis of the whole Christian life” (CCC 1213).

## **“What exactly is baptism and what does it do?”**

Baptism is the sacrament by which we “are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission” (CCC 1213). Baptism frees us from original sin (for Scripture references for original sin see Psalm 51:5, Rom. 5:12-19, 1 Cor. 15:21, Eph. 2:1-3) all personal sin committed up to the time of baptism and configures us to Christ with an indelible mark/character/seal (therefore you can only baptize a person once) on our soul (see Eph 4:30, Eph 1:13014; 2 Cor 1:21-22).

## **Why is Baptism so important?**

Simply put, Baptism is important and necessary for salvation because of Jesus’ own words “truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Furthermore, 1 Peter 3:21 states emphatically the saving nature of baptism “baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Mark 16:15-16 says, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be

saved.” See also Acts 2:38, 16:33 and 22:16 along with Matthew 28:19, 1 Peter 3:21 and Titus 3:5.

## **“Why baptize infants?”**

The Catechism teaches us that

“Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.” (CCC 1250)

In Scripture, St. Paul says that Baptism replaces circumcision (which brought children into a covenant with God) and since babies were circumcised when they were 8 days old (Gn 17:12) it would make sense that infants would be brought into the New Covenant through baptism. Further, numerous times in the New Testament it is mentioned that whole families and households were baptized (Acts 16:33 I Cor 1:16). Wouldn’t it be strange if none of the families in the Scriptures had infants? Jesus Himself in Lk 18:15; “let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” (see also Mat 19:14). Now, because Baptism is the normative way we enter into the

kingdom of God and children belong to the kingdom it would seem that children should be baptized.

But what about consent and the profession of faith such as in Romans 10:9 where it says, "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Wouldn't infant baptism preclude a profession of faith? Let's for a moment turn back to the Old Testament and Exodus 13:2,13-14 where it teaches that the firstborn male was to be dedicated to God. The firstborn was to be dedicated to God as an infant and later be explained to as to why. The dedication was not contingent upon the firstborn's consent. Similarly, in Luke 5:20 we see Jesus forgiving the paralyzed man not because of his faith but because of the faith of his friends. In infant baptism, the godparent asks for faith on behalf of the infant (CCC 1253). This faith though must grow and therefore the baptized are asked each Easter to renew their baptismal promises (CCC 1254). Hence, "baptism is the sacrament of

faith" (CCC 1253) though this faith can be asked for by godparents if the person baptized is still an infant.

Infant baptism was also practiced in the early Church. For instance, Hippolytus around 215 AD writes, "The children are to be baptized first. All of them who can, are to give answer for themselves. If they cannot, let their parents or someone in the family answer for them" (Apostolic Tradition 21). Also, Origen around 230 AD stresses the apostolic practice of Baptism in these words "the Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism also to infants" (Comm. on Romans 5, 9).

Baptism is a beautiful and wondrous sacrament by which we become children of God and members of the Church. Let us continually strive to learn more about the richness of this sacrament and let the graces received through Baptism enrich our lives

## SCRIPTURE QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

John 6:53



## BOOK OF THE MONTH

### *Sacraments in Scripture*

By Tim Gray

*Sacraments in Scripture* delves into the biblical foundations of the sacraments, the seven masterpieces of God's love. Tim Gray guides readers through the Gospels, showing Christ's deliberate acts to inaugurate these sacred signs of the New Covenant. With review questions at the end of each chapter, this study is ideal for both group and individual use, and is perfect for learning how to answer contemporary objections to the sacraments.

*Sacraments in Scripture* is available from the Coming Home Network at 740-450-1175 or [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com)

# CHANGED BUT STILL CHANGING?

By Marcus Grodi

## CHURCH FATHERS QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"And then remember that you received the seal of the Spirit; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and godliness, and the spirit of holy fear, and preserved what you received. God the Father sealed you, Christ the Lord strengthened you, and gave the earnest of the Spirit in your heart, as you have learned in the lesson from the Apostle." Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 7:42 (A.D. 391).

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul warned him that when Timothy appoints new bishops in the churches under his charge, he must not appoint "a recent convert" (1 Tim 3:6). The primary reason St. Paul gave for this caution is that a new convert raised to the level of leadership too quickly may become "puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." But why is this a particular danger for new converts? Isn't this also true for anyone raised into leadership?

Yes, of course, but what sets converts apart is that it takes time for converts to recognize, appreciate, and deal with the unique differences and distinctions between their previous beliefs and their new Catholic beliefs. Converts can be blind to many of these important differences, not just while on their journeys, but also months and, even years, afterwards. I know this to be true

"In our baptisms, and then later in our confirmations, the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us, changing us in a very real and powerful way."

myself, for there are many things, especially in the area of Catholic spirituality, that I am still wrestling with fifteen years after my conversion. One of the areas that has taken me years to appreciate is the difference between the Protestant and Catholic understanding of baptism. In none of my former Lutheran, Congregationalist, or Presbyterian backgrounds did I believe that baptism — whether a sacrament, an ordinance, or merely a symbolic act — was essential to salvation. I only considered belief in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior to

be essential to salvation. Whether a person was baptized or not, or whether a person was in a church or not, was inconsequential. In this short article, I'd like to discuss briefly how I've come to understand and appreciate the Catholic understanding of the essential nature of baptism, especially as expressed in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

In our baptisms, and then later in our confirmations, the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us, changing us in a very real and powerful way. St. Paul described this change in 2 Corinthians when he wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself ..." (5:17-18). Through these very powerful sacraments we were changed, and as St. Paul explained in Ephesians, as a result we are "no longer strangers and sojourners, but ... fellow

citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (2:19-20).

This is true whether we feel it or not, and this change has happened to us in three dimensions, again as explained in Ephesians: we have been reconciled to God, to others, and to ourselves — to the inner man.

Yes, through the Sacraments we have been changed, but this is only the beginning! This is no guarantee! From the moment of that change, we either move forward towards intimacy with God or backwards away from Him, depending upon how we respond to Him in grace — we do not merely remain the same. We immediately have been changed within, but yet we leave the waters of the sacrament with the same habits, attitudes, passions, and lusts. We must act on the graces we’ve been given to resist the downward slide away from His love.

In Ephesians, St. Paul described this active journey of faith when he begged the newly baptized “... to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:1-3). He also prayed: “... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which

surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:16-19).

This journey begins with choosing to lead a life worthy of Him, by grace and obedience, and then by getting back up again whenever we fall by going to the sacrament of confession. We aim towards being filled with His fullness.

Later in Ephesians, however, he also described the journey in the opposite direction, which involves becoming: “...darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness” (4:18-19).

What is significant about this list is that St. Paul was describing their former way of life — what they were like before they were baptized.

But weren’t they changed? Why do they need to worry about returning to their old way of life? Because, sadly, this is exactly what far too many baptized and catechized Christians do: they fail to act on the graces they have received, either out of ignorance, discouragement, or sloth.

The truth is there is not one of us who hasn’t failed. Even as St. Paul himself admitted, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward

call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14).

So how do we effectively forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead? How do we start all over again, when we have fallen so many times? In Ephesians, St. Paul gives a clear challenge that I think everyone of us ought to memorize, and repeat every day, hearing it as God’s merciful words to each of us (4:22-24):

“Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

In our baptisms, we were changed, but yet we are called to keep changing, all the way to the end, when by grace we are given the privilege of standing before Him in paradise. Every day, when we cross ourselves in remembrance of our baptisms and what He did for us in love on the cross, we are called to remember that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10).

I encourage you to take this challenge every morning in prayer, every time during the day you feel the temptation to fall backwards, and every night as you pause to examine how successfully you have followed Him that day. In time, by grace, this will help you fulfill your baptismal calling and “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).

Sincerely in Christ

— Marcus Grodi

# CONFIRMATION

**By Peter Rowe**

One of the seven Sacraments in the Catholic Church is Confirmation (called Chrismation in the Eastern Church). The glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that Confirmation is: “One of the ensemble of the Sacraments of Initiation into the Church, together with Baptism and Eucharist. Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which seal or “confirm” the baptized in union with Christ and equip for the active participation in the worship and apostolic life of the Church.” As somebody who has assisted on several youth retreats, I would like to emphasize that nowhere in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Compendium*, or the *Code of Canon Law* or any other source of theology is Confirmation taught to be the recipient “confirming” his or her own baptism. The source of the “confirming” in Confirmation is the gift of the Holy Spirit; it is He who confirms the Baptismal graces 2.

What does Confirmation do? Paragraph 1303 of the *Catechism* gives the effects of Confirmation: it deepens our sonship in relationship to God; it unites closer to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it brings us closer to the Church; it gives a special grace to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lastly, par. 1305 says that the character of Confirmation “perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism,” and the confirmed

person even “receives the power to profess faith in Christ and even as it were officially.” Confirmation is important, and its power is confirmed by the *indelible mark on the soul* that it gives (CCC 1304). (An indelible mark is a special seal, that imprints in the soul a transformation that will never leave it.)

The celebration of Confirmation is different between the East and the West. Traditionally, the West has held that the *normative* minister of Confirmation is the Bishop. 3 In the East, Confirmation is celebrated at Baptism and hence the Priest confers the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation (Chrismation) and Eucharist at the same time. However, he may only use oil consecrated by a Bishop, and in some cases, a Patriarch. 4 The essential rite of Confirmation is the Anointing of Oil on the forehead and the words, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” (In the East, the anointing is over several body parts and the words used are “*The Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit*”).

Scripturally, the Sacrament of Confirmation is clearly Biblical. “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” (*Acts* 8:

**“Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”**

15-17). The writer to the Hebrews possibly alludes to Confirmation in 6: 2. The *Catechism* teaches that Confirmation is the seal given that we might be saved in the “great eschatological trial.” (CCC 1296; cf. *Rev.* 7: 2-3; 9: 4; *Ez.* 9: 4-6). The notion that, as stated above, that confirmation enables to witness to the Faith of the Church, appears in the First Letter of John, where we read, “I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in.” (1 *John* 2: 27; cf. 1: 2: 20, alternate reading in the RSV *and you know everything*).

Confirmation is clearly witnessed to in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. St. Hippolytus says, “And what the oil, if not the power of the Holy Spirit? It is with these, after the washing, that believers are anointed as with a sweet smelling oil.” 5

St. Cyprian of Carthage writes, “It is necessary for him that has been baptized also to be anointed, so that by his having received chrism, that is, the anointing, he can be anointed of God and have in himself the grace of Christ.” 6 An undeniable reference to this great Sacrament is

found in his 73<sup>rd</sup> letter: “For the reason, then, that they had already received legitimate and ecclesiastical Baptism, it was not necessary to baptize them again. Rather, that only which was lacking was done by Peter and John; and thus, prayer having been made over them, and hands having been imposed upon them, the Holy Spirit was invoked and was poured out upon them. This is even now the practice among us, so that those who are baptized in the Church are then brought to the prelates of the Church; and through our prayer and the imposition of hands, they receive the Holy Spirit and are perfected with the seal of the Lord.” 7

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, “But beware of supposing that this is ordinary ointment. For just as the Bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit is simply bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no longer plain ointment, nor, so to speak, common, after the invocation. Rather, it is the gracious gift of Christ; and it is made fit for the imparting of His Godhead by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and to your other senses; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment,

your soul is sanctified by the Holy and Lifecreating Spirit.” 8

St. Ambrose says, “[Baptism] is followed by a spiritual signing, as you have heard in the reading today; for after the

## CATECHISM QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, man receives the new life of Christ.”

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1420

font it but remains to perfect the work, when at the invocation of the Holy Spirit is poured out” 9. St. Augustine taught, “The Sacrament of Chrism... is a sacrosanct one in that class of visible signs, like Baptism itself.” 10 Lastly, Pope Innocent said, “In regard to the confirming of infants, however, it is

clear that it is not permitted to be done by any other than the bishop. For the presbyters, granted they be secondary priests, do not, however, possess the summit of the pontificate. This pontifical power, however, by which they confirm or confer the Spirit Paraclete, is shown to belong only to bishops, not only by ecclesiastical custom but also by that passage of the Acts of the Apostles which declares that Peter and John were directed to the Holy Spirit to persons already baptized. For it is permitted presbyters, when they baptize either without a bishop or in the presence of a bishop, to anoint the baptized with chrism, but with chrism which has been consecrated by a bishop; they are not permitted, however, to sign the forehead with that same oil, which signing pertains to bishops only, when they confirm the Spirit Paraclete.”<sup>11</sup>

The Sacrament of Confirmation, as one of the Sacraments of Christian initiation,

should assist us deeply in our spiritual life. Indeed, as the *Catechism* teaches, the Sacrament of Confirmation *perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church*.<sup>12</sup> May we, like the early Apostles, be inflamed to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth.

<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1302-1303

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1312-1314

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1297

<sup>4</sup> *Commentary on Daniel*, 1, 16, Jurgens 390 (Jurgens references are to passages and not to pages.). I could not find this passage in the Hendrickson Ante-Nicene Fathers.

<sup>5</sup> *Letter of Cyprian in Council with Thirty-Seven other Bishops*: 70: 2. Jurgens 592. Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5, pg. 376. (The numbering of the Letter in the Ante-Nicene Fathers is one different than in the Jurgens book.)

<sup>6</sup> *Letter 73*, 9. Jurgens 595. Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5, 381. (See above on the numbering of Cyprian’s letters.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechetical Lectures*, 21, 3. Jurgens 842. Hendrickson: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol. 7 pg. 150.

<sup>8</sup> *The Sacraments*, 3, 1, 7.; Jurgens 1337. Not in the Hendrickson Volume of Ambrose.

<sup>9</sup> *Against the Letters of Petilian the Donatist*, 2, 104, 239..Jurgens 1647. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, vol. 4 pg. 592. (The Letter is chapter 105 in the Hendrickson series).

<sup>10</sup> *Letter to Decentius, Bishop of Gubbio*, 25, 3,6. Jurgens 2015. Pope Innocent’s writings are not in the Hendrickson series. But for confirmation of the letter, one can go to the *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, by Loreto Publications, and find it in section 98.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1288.

## The Winnowing Effect of the Eucharist

By Marcus Grodi

What could possibly compel otherwise happy non-Catholic Christians to consider and then convert to the Catholic faith? Surprisingly, many, many things, but one of the most important is found in chapter six of the Gospel of John. In fact, all of chapter six, not just those controversial verses in the 50s, directly addresses why so many of us concluded we must become Catholic, for one of the primary themes of this powerful chapter is winnowing: thinning down the crowd to those who truly believe.

The chapter begins with the miraculous feeding of the five-thousand, and, as a result, “*When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”* (6:14) So we begin with a large crowd of people who, with the courage of “group think,” exclaim their faith in Jesus. But Jesus wasn’t convinced. The next day, when Jesus was preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59), he posed the subject that would serve to winnow down this crowd: “*Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son*

of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal" (26-28).

In response, the crowd, or at least one or two of their spokesmen, asked the age-old question, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (28) As Jews, they should have had an age-old answer to this question, but people are always seeking an easier answer than the one they already have. So Jesus gave them an answer they didn't expect. He essentially drew a line in the sand, based on their very exclamation of faith, and dared them to cross: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (29).

The crowd responded with their own "line." Ok, admittedly they had responded from full stomachs. "So they said to him, Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (30-31)

Seems like an amazingly sophisticated response for your average uneducated rural Jewish audience, since they quoted Exodus 16:15 which reads, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." Could one of the pharisees, buried in the crowd, have been taunting Jesus, trying to trick him into blasphemy? Jesus knowing what is in the hearts of men, as John tells us earlier, responded, not flippantly, but with his most serious form of proclamation: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (32-33).

It's possible that before the Pharisee could wrap his mind around this for another theological response, several commoners from the crowd, like the woman at the well, cried out in earnest, "Lord, give us this bread always" (34). This request may have offended the pharisees and scribes, who considered themselves the ones to whom the crowd was to come for spiritual food, but before they could answer, Jesus responded: "**I am the bread of life; he who comes**

**to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.** But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. **For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day**" (35-40).

Here was an answer none within hearing ever expected. Imagine, if you have a comedic imagination, a thousand people standing with their jaws to the ground. This is the last we hear of the crowd. This was more than they can handle. The winnowing process has begun, leaving only the Jews (i.e., the pharisees and scribes) and those who had declared themselves "the disciples of Jesus."

The pharisees and scribes huddled up and "murmured at him, **because he said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.'** They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (41-42)

But you can't keep anything from Jesus. Often it is reported that he knows what people are whispering. Here is his first opportunity to correct any misunderstanding they might have concerning his words, but he doesn't: "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last

day... Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. **I am the bread of life.** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. **This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh**" (43-51).

**"Jesus gave them an answer they didn't expect. He essentially drew a line in the sand, based on their very exclamation of faith, and dared them to cross."**

Startled, the pharisees and scribes probably pulled their huddle in even tighter and *“disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’”* (52) They expressed in whispers what the crowd had found revolting: Jesus was not speaking figuratively—his words seemed to mean exactly what he said.

Presuming that Jesus again heard their murmurings, he had a second opportunity to soften any misunderstandings, but instead he couldn't have piled it on deeper: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever”*** (53-59).

From this point on in chapter 6, we hear nothing more of the Jews (pharisees and scribes). They have huddled away to fine-tune their plot against Jesus, leaving only his disciples. Apparently some of them are not happy with the boldness of His words. *“Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”* (60) Once again, Jesus knew “in himself that his disciples murmured at it” (61) and with his friends now had an intimate third opportunity to straighten out any misunderstandings. In other circumstances, Jesus has admitted

to his followers that to the crowd he often spoke in parables while to them he was clear, sharing with them the secrets of the kingdom of God (cf., Luke 8:9f ). So, as with the parable of the Sower, he could have given them the keys to his symbolism. But he wasn't speaking in symbols. To them he said, possibly with growing frustration (*“O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?”* Matthew 17:17), *“Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe”* (61-64).

I used to argue that here Jesus was admitting that he was only speaking in images not literally, but no where else in Scripture does Jesus use “spirit” to mean symbol. When he said *“God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24), did he mean that God is only a symbol? When he said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5), was he only speaking figuratively? Hardly, but regardless, even his closest friends did not understand him as speaking figuratively, for we read that *“[a]fter this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him”* (66).

The winnowing process, all focused on accepting Jesus at his word concerning eating his body and drinking his blood, had reduced the large crowd down to twelve, and “Jesus said to the twelve, *‘Do you also wish to go away?’*” (67), and the winnowing process had not ended, for only

one of these spoke up: *“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’*” (68-69).

Three quick things in closing: First, is there any wonder that Jesus chose Simon Peter upon whom to build his Church? Here Peter models for us *“the obedience of faith”* (Romans 1:5), even when we do not fully understand; even when our senses tell us something different than what Jesus is calling us to believe. Let's face it, how hard was it for Simon Peter to believe that the plain human being standing before him was “the Holy One of God?” Second, when we recognize, through the teaching of Saint Paul, that the Church, *“the pillar and bulwark of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15) is the very *“body of Christ”* (1 Cor 12; Eph 4), then if we want truth, *“to whom shall we go?”* Finally, with whom in Jesus' audience do you affiliate: the crowd, the Jewish leaders, the wider circle of disciples who left because they found Jesus' teachings too hard to stomach, the eleven who sat silent, unwilling to commit themselves, or Simon Peter who, at least in this instance, allowed faith to seek understanding? Where are you in the winnowing process?

Sincerely in Christ

— Marcus Grod  
www.marcusgrodi.com

# NOVENA OF THE MONTH

Divine Mercy Sunday is the first Sunday after Easter. A beautiful way to prepare for this feast is to pray for nine days prior the below novena. For more information on the Divine Mercy devotion go here <http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/mercy/index.htm>. Novena taken from <http://www.ewtn.com/Devotionals/Novena/divine.htm>.

I fly to Your Mercy, Compassionate God, Who alone are good. Although my misery is great and my offenses are many, I trust in Your Mercy because You are the God of Mercy, and it has never been heard of in all ages, nor do Heaven or Earth remember, that a soul trusting in Your Mercy has been disappointed.

(State your intentions)

\_\_ Jesus, Friend of a lonely heart, You are my haven.

You are my peace.

You are my salvation.

You are my serenity in moments of struggle and amidst an ocean of doubts.

Amen

***Are you a teen or young adult on the journey into the Catholic Church?***

Quo Vadis exists to provide fellowship and support to all youth who wish to draw closer to Jesus Christ and His One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, especially the youth of converting Protestant clergy or lay people.

For more information please contact

Mary Clare Pieczynski

[maryp@chnetwork.org](mailto:maryp@chnetwork.org) or 740-450-1175 ext 105

***“I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.”***

***Psalm 40***

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