

## Item #94 (“Will you also go away?”)

**Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John** is one of the most challenging passages in the entire Bible, and as such deserves continuing reflection. In Chapter 6 the evangelist John, who was chosen by Jesus to witness officially to both His humanity (as a witness to his resurrection) and to His divinity (the purpose of the Fourth Gospel) faces the fact that when Jesus announces His Real Presence in the Eucharistic Bread a sizable number of His disciples fall away and walk with Him no more (John 6,60.64). This disbelief in the Real Presence among disciples of Jesus is not limited to the disciples of John 6. Recent studies indicate that well over half of Catholics in the United States do not believe that the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is real but only symbolic. Given this disturbing fact even Catholic believers in the Real Presence should examine their belief and see if it is as profound as Jesus obviously expects it to be.

The accounts from the life of Jesus that John uses to lead up to the account of the disciples failure to believe are instructive, for they are so presented in Chapter 6 as to prepare the readers of his gospel to grasp the ill-advised nature of this refusal. Presumably the marshaling of such accounts represent the thinking of Jesus Himself. Accordingly, what follows is a listing of the accounts of John 6.

John 6,1-15: the multiplication of loaves.

John 6,16-21. (In verse 20 Jesus uses the wording “I am” to signify His divinity. See Item #83.)

John 6,22-40: discourse on the Bread from heaven.

These three accounts from the ministry of Jesus should prepare the reader of John’s Gospel to have an insight into the thinking of Jesus and thus prepare him/her to see the folly of disbelief when Jesus speaks of the Real Presence. But John 6 is not only about the disciples of Jesus who do not believe in His teaching about His Real Presence. It ends on a positive note, telling about the disciples who do believe who are represented by Peter (6,66-69), even though Jesus feels constrained to mention that not all the apostles whom Peter represents believe as Peter does (6,70-71).

But it seems to me that the reader of this instructive passage should take his or her cue from the disbelief of some of the disciples of Jesus even if they remain believers, and ask themselves if their belief is as profound as it should be. Repeated readings and prayerful meditation on the whole of John would seem to be not contrary to John’s purpose in including the material of John 6 in his gospel.

The radical difference between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the Gospel of John--the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke present Jesus as human and the Gospel of John presents Jesus as divine--is seen in the presentation of the Eucharist. The institution of the Eucharist views the Eucharist as a sacrifice in which is both Priest and Victim. His death is understood as terminating in His risen Body. This presupposes that He is human, for God as God cannot die. In John there is no account of the institution of the Eucharist: the Eucharist is presented in John 6,22-40 as having descended from heaven. Matthew, Mark and Luke thus view the future of Jesus as one of life in a Risen Body, whereas John views the future of Jesus as one in relation to His heavenly Father. There is a question of emphasis, for all four Evangelists believe that Jesus is human and divine. The continual insistence by Jesus that all who believe in His Real Presence will have eternal life is an invitation to each believer to keep this goal in view and serves as an implicit promise from Jesus and His Father to assist the believer in this core of Catholic life. **(James Swetnam, S.J., April 4, 2022)**