

The Gospel in these days is quite dramatic. Yesterday, Jesus said to his followers that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood if they want to have life in them. Today, we hear that 'after this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.'

For Jews, drinking blood is absolutely forbidden. Let's be honest, for every person, the very idea of eating human flesh is simply abhorrent. So, I agree with the people who found Jesus' language intolerable.

My question is this: Why didn't Jesus soften his teaching a little bit? At least, he could have explained to his disciples that they would soon be eating his flesh and drinking his blood in a form of bread and wine. But he deliberately offered no further explanation.

Perhaps Jesus knew that many of his followers stayed with him for the wrong reason. Some, because they saw the dead being raised to life and the crowds being fed for free. Others followed Jesus in hope that he would soon kick out the Romans and become a great political leader. In one way or the other, they thought they would be better off if they stuck with Jesus.

So, Jesus used his Eucharistic Speech to put his followers through a sieve. He wanted to find out who was genuinely interested in becoming a disciple, and who was simply an opportunist. Peter and the other disciples who decided to stay would later, at the Last Supper, understand what Jesus meant by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They had to be patient. They had to wait.

Do we stick with Jesus for the right reason? Why do we follow him? Oftentimes, it is when we go through difficult and challenging times that we can give the true answer.

Yesterday, a parishioner sent me a photo of a baby who was born two days ago with his intestines on the outside of his body. It was sheer joy to see this new life, a beautiful baby boy. On the other hand, it was heart-breaking to see him suffer so greatly.

What can we say when confronted by situations like that? The truth is that we all have to deal with sickness, accidents and tragedies. Jesus himself, though innocent, was tortured and killed on a cross. St Athanasius, a great and holy bishop, was victim of a plot and forced into exile only because he defended Christ's divinity. Many lies were told about him.

What can we do when confronted by evil, injustice, suffering? Well, we can say to Jesus: This is an intolerable situation and walk away. Or we can do what Peter did, and say: 'Lord, to whom shall I go. You have the words to eternal life.' At this moment, I do not understand why this is happening to me, to my family, to my friends, but I trust you. I trust that one day you will help me make some sense of it all. In the meantime, I will wait and follow you patiently for deeply in my heart I believe that God is good; 'he is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit' (Psalm 34).