

The final passage of John's sixth chapter is difficult to understand correctly, because of the great invasion from the Last Supper of the Institution account of the Eucharist, which so surprisingly no longer appears at its proper place in John's Last Supper account.

To understand today's passage correctly, we must return to the end of the synagogue sermon, and remember the summary of it that Jesus gave:

*I am the bread which has come down from heaven.
Your Fathers ate manna, and they are dead.
This is the true bread given by the Father,
so that you may eat it and not die.*

The eating of this bread means *coming to Jesus, hearing his teaching, and believing that he has come from the Father.*

This claim for himself is the "intolerable language" that the people cannot accept. Jesus knows. They cannot believe he has come from above: so he asks them:

What if you see me ascend to where I came from?

Now, "ascent to the Father" in Jesus' words is one of the ways he talks about the Cross, when he will be *lifted up*. For those who cannot believe his claim, the Cross itself will be the ultimate moment of judgment. Then he nails his colours firmly to his claim. He told them not to look for earthly bread, for easy human answers: now he tells them:

*It is the spirit that gives life:
the flesh has nothing to offer.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit,
and they are life.*

His final words to them are about going beyond what is physical, to the word, and the call to believe in it. This is the crunch. If they refuse him their faith, they can no longer accompany him on his way to the Father; and he lets them go, because they realise that they are not with him. He applies the same test to his dumbstruck disciples:

What about you? Can you accept my word, or will you go away too?

We must hear the same challenge. Do we accept his words as the ultimate message from heaven to earth? Or are we still playing at faith, and in reality running our lives according to the world that is passing away?

It is such an important moment, that John has chosen it to be the moment when Simon Peter makes his profession of faith, which in the other Gospels is the turning-point of the whole account:

*Lord, where would we go?
You have the message of eternal life,
and we believe:
we know that you are the Holy One of God.*