

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Comforting and Challenging** Third Week of Easter Saturday, May 10, 2014 8:15 AM  
Acts 9:31-42; **Jn 6:60-69** (St. Damien de Veuster of Molokai, priest; St. Francis Xavier Seelos, priest) (What we need is the Spirit's guidance, inspiration, empowerment.)

**“We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”**

This, of course, is a theme throughout the Fourth Gospel: **coming to believe**. It's not a moment in time where one simply decides to believe. **It's a process, and it leads to the conviction that Jesus is really sent from God.** That doesn't mean the disciples are going to now sit and define who Jesus is, write out a creed, teach a class in theology, no. That's all later and it's all extra. What it really means is a deep conviction that Jesus is from God, not being able to talk theologically about his relationship to the Father and so on, or his nature and substance and all those terms that later became so very important to certain people, but rather conviction that Jesus is from God. **Whatever is beginning in him is from God, and that it is a movement that embraces people, people he is calling to follow him.**

So **this conviction is of the essence of faith.** Faith is trust, yes, in God, but now it's conviction that Jesus is from God. Again, a very important point in the Fourth Gospel, other three too, but really important in the Fourth Gospel. For example, Jesus says, “You have faith in God; have faith in me also,” because faith in God can be very vague. But this conviction that what Jesus is doing, what Jesus is saying, is really from God, that is the absolute **essential beginning of Christian faith**, distinguishing Christian faith from other even worthy and noble forms of religion.

Now what is this all about Jesus' disciples leaving? Well, from the very beginning **Jesus gathered and scattered people.** People were drawn to him, and yet that doesn't mean that everyone drawn to him is going to stay. People leaving Jesus was also something going on from the beginning. Probably the real leaving of Jesus happened after his death and

resurrection, probably, maybe, quite a few years later when persecutions really became more intense. This gospel probably reflects that. But **even in Jesus' day not everyone who came to him to listen was really convinced.** We have to keep that in mind.

The actual **dispute** being referred to here, at least in the context of this gospel, is **about his body and blood, the gift of the Eucharist.** Again, as you might remember yesterday, people were leaving because they were quarreling among themselves: How could this be; how can he give us his body to eat? Well, of course, that is taking everything literally, and, of course, **one cannot take Jesus' teachings literally.** They are not intended to be literal, but they have great meaning that we have to uncover, and that's work. Some people don't like work, especially they don't like spiritual work. They don't want to really be challenged. They want to be comforted, but not challenged. Well, both are part of what God is doing in our lives. **He is comforting us, but he is also challenging us. He is empowering us, but he is also confronting us.** And this is all part of the movement that comes embodied in Christ.

So as we now proceed, we have to look at this moment Jesus says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh is of no avail." So **what we need is the Spirit's guidance, inspiration, empowerment,** if you will. We need something not of ourselves, something grander, deeper, drawing us beyond our little self, our little flesh, our little mind, even our little soul, to the grand design that God has for us all.