

Homily based on the readings from May 10, 2025 (Acts 9.31-42; John 6.60-69)

“This saying is hard; who can accept it?” In case you were not at Mass yesterday morning, we need to back up a few verses to understand precisely what Jesus is talking about:

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

After almost 2000 years of Eucharistic worship, this statement does not seem nearly as controversial *now* as it did to its original audience.

Besides evoking the prospect of cannibalism, the most *shocking* aspect of Christ’s command was that his followers were required to “drink his blood.” With our modern notions of hygiene and sanitation, most people

today think of blood as being dirty or contaminated. Quite the opposite was true in ancient Judaism. Blood was viewed as the *essence* of life – a substance that is uniquely and incomparably *sacred*. From this perspective, drinking blood was viewed as an act of *blasphemy*. As we read in Leviticus:

As for anyone, whether of the house of Israel or of the aliens residing among them, who consumes any blood, I will set myself against that individual and will cut that person off from among the people, since the life of the flesh is in the blood. (17.10-11)

This passage is particularly referring to the blood of animals that are killed for food. The prospect of drinking *human* blood – which is *infinitely* more sacred than that of any other species – would have completely unthinkable.

In the modern world, of course, our perspective tends to be more mundane. Consuming the blood of animals – or even human beings – barely seems worth mentioning. For the past 500 years, the problem has

not been that people were *unwilling* to drink the Blood of Christ, but that they were *unable* to recognize that Blood for what it truly is.

The most heartbreaking consequence of the so-called Protestant Reformation is the *loss* of belief in the sacred – especially in the *reality* of Christ in the Eucharist. It is a cruel irony that many of our Protestant brothers and sisters – who insist on reading the Bible *literally* when it comes to the timeframe of Creation or the dimensions of Noah’s Ark – willfully ignore the direct testimony of Jesus Christ: “This *is* my body. This *is* my blood.” Imprisoned by the language of symbolism, they *intentionally* deprive themselves of the source and summit of the Christian life.

As Catholics, we face a similar challenge – albeit in a different form. The main issue for *us* is not *error* or *misinterpretation*, but *familiarity* and *apathy*. When something has been readily available every single day of our lives, it is difficult to recognize how *precious* it truly is. The struggle we face is twofold. First of all, we need to recognize how

utterly *astounding* it is that the Only-Begotten Son of God would offer his own Body and Blood for us to eat and drink. Secondly, we need to commit ourselves, fully and without reservation, to making our participation in this Sacrament the focus of our lives – not a casual observance, not a rite of passage, but the supreme act of Christian worship. “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” Nevertheless, if we remain faithful to the words of Jesus Christ – *humbly* and *joyfully* partaking of his Body and Blood – then *surely* we will come to share in his heavenly inheritance.