Today’s Gospel proclamation calls you and me to make a choice. The Gospel calls us to choose life. The Gospel calls us to follow Jesus.

Theology professors are like other teachers, looking for creative ways to make a good point. I once read of what a theology professor did at the very end of the semester, at the time of the final exam.

He hands out the test paper with all the questions, but tells the students to first read it through to the end before answering the questions. He even writes that same caution at the top of the test paper. However, as students begin to read through the test, they all realize how much they don’t know and that they should have studied more.

And then, about halfway through the test, some students become restless. They have finally read the professor’s comment at the very end of the test sheet: “You have a choice. You can either complete the test as it’s given here, or, you can simply sign your name at the bottom, turn it in, and, by doing so, receive an A.”

Many students are confused. Is the prof serious? Does he really mean that they can skip the test and simply accept an A grade? Some students choose to cooperate with the professor’s request and accept his offer. They stand, bring their test sheet forward to hand in, and leave the room. They each receive an A.

Over the years, the professor experiences different reactions from students. Some simply take the test and work through it for the entire two-hour test period, never reading the professor’s last comment. Some find the test questions too difficult and leave in anger without ever trying to answer them, or signing their names, or accepting what the professor offers them. One student reads the professor’s comment, but decides he still needs to prove himself by earning a grade, so he takes the test and earns a C+ – but he could’ve had an A.¹

Today is the last of five Sundays in which we listen to passages from Chapter Six of John’s Gospel – a chapter that focuses on Jesus as the Bread of Life, as the one who satisfies our spiritual hunger. Throughout the chapter, we hear people speak of Jesus’ offer of eternal life. Then, when the Gospel affirms that Jesus offers us his flesh and blood, people become increasingly confused and disturbed. And today, the Gospel reminds us that some folks find Jesus’ words to be so disturbing that they stop following him. They have to make a choice, and they choose to leave Jesus and go elsewhere. They simply cannot accept Jesus’ offer of himself in the Eucharist. They cannot accept Jesus as the Bread of Life.
Recently, I spoke of second century bishop, Saint Iranaeus, who wrote: *The glory of God is a person fully alive.* In other words, Jesus offers you and me life – a full life. Jesus invites you and me to live life to the full, not by acquiring more and more things, but by simply saying Yes – by simply saying *Amen!* to his offer of life. When we choose to let Jesus be front and center in our lives and to accept what He offers us, we realize we really don’t need to prove ourselves. There is no test we have to take. We simply open our hearts and our lives and accept his offer of life.

Teenager, here’s what this can mean for you. How you live your life remains important, but it’s not an ongoing test that you have to pass. Instead, know that when you choose to follow Jesus, the *Bread of Life*, you’ll find that his presence influences how you live.

I ask you to put yourself into that Gospel scene that speaks of Jesus as the *Bread of Life*. Most of us are not from the Middle East, so we easily miss the fuller significance of Jesus’ words. For folks in the Middle East, bread is not something extra they put on the dinner table. Bread for them is what we think of as pita bread, and it’s at the heart of a meal. They wouldn’t think of using a fork to stab the food they eat. Instead, they break off a piece of bread and use it to scoop up the food, which they then eat. The bread is the only way they get to the main dish.²

In other words, the Gospel affirms that Jesus, the *Bread of Life*, is the way we get to life itself. And so, Jesus is the One who can satisfy our deepest spiritual hunger.

Lately, I’ve spoken of our parish as mission territory. We all know someone who feels empty or spiritually hungry – someone you can invite to join you here on a Sunday and give them the chance to choose the life Jesus offers them. Our parish mission statement affirms that we welcome everyone to our Church.

And while some choose to leave Jesus, others choose to stay and accept Jesus’ offer of life to the full. In today’s Gospel, Saint Peter speaks for them and for us gathered in this sacred space, saying:

*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.*

Our parish vision puts it in these words:

*We choose to follow Jesus Christ, in joy, gratitude, and serve.*

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¹ attributed to Charles Stanley.