

## John: 6:57–69

### From Catena Aurea:

55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

58. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

59. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi. 1) i. e. this is no enigma, or parable, but ye must really eat the body of Christ; or He means to say that the true meat was He who saved the soul.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvi. 17) Or thus: Whereas men desire meat and drink to satisfy hunger and thirst, this effect is only really produced by that meat and drink, which makes the receivers of it immortal and incorruptible; i. e. the society of Saints, where is peace and unity, full and perfect. On which account our Lord has chosen for the types of His body and blood, things which become one out of many. Bread is a quantity of grains united into one mass, wine a quantity of grapes squeezed together. Then He explains what it is to eat His body and drink His blood: He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. So then to partake of that meat and that drink, is to dwell in Christ and Christ in thee. He that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, neither eateth His flesh, nor drinketh His blood: but rather eateth and drinketh the sacrament of it to his own damnation.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi. 1) Or, having given a promise of eternal life to those that eat Him, He says this to confirm it: He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.

**AUGUSTINE.** (de Verb. Dom.) As for those, as indeed there are many, who either eat that flesh and drink that blood hypocritically, or, who having eaten, become apostates, do they dwell in Christ, and

Christ in them? Nay, but there is a certain mode of eating that flesh, and drinking that blood, in the which he that eateth and drinketh, dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him.

**AUGUSTINE.** (de Civ. Dei, l. xxi. c. 25) That is to say, such an one eateth the body and drinketh the blood of Christ not in the sacramental sense, but in reality.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi) And because I live, it is manifest that he will live also: As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, even so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. (Aug. de Verb. Dom. [Nic.]). As if He said, As the Father liveth, so do I live; adding, lest you should think Him unbegotten, By the Father, meaning that He has His source in the Father. He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me; the life here meant is not life simply, but the justified life: for even unbelievers live, who never eat of that flesh at all. Nor is it of the general resurrection He speaks, (for all will rise again,) but of the resurrection to glory, and reward.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvi. s. 19) He saith not, As I eat the Father, and live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. For the Son does not grow better by partaking of the Father, as we do by partaking of the Son, i. e. of His one body and blood, which this eating and drinking signifies. So that His saying, I live by the Father, because He is from Him, must not be understood as detracting from His equality. Nor do the words, Even he that eateth Me, the same shall live by Me, give us the equality that He has. He does not equalize, but only mediates between God and man. If, however, we understand the words, I live by the Father, in the sense of those below, My Father is greater than I, (c. 14:28) then it is as if He said, That I live by the Father, i. e. refer my life to Him, as my superior, my<sup>1</sup> humiliation in my incarnation is the cause; but He who lives by Me, lives by Me by virtue of partaking of My flesh.

**HILARY.** (vii. de Trin. c. 14) Of the truth then of the body and blood of Christ, no room for doubting remains: for, by the declaration of our Lord Himself, and by the teaching of our own faith, the flesh is really flesh, and the blood really blood. This then is our principle of life. While we are in the flesh, Christ dwelleth in us by His flesh. (c.14:19) And we shall live by Him, according as He liveth. If then we live naturally by partaking of Him according to the flesh, He also liveth naturally by the indwelling of the Father according to the Spirit. His birth did not give Him an alien or different nature from the Father.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvi. c. 20) That we who cannot obtain eternal life of ourselves, might live by the eating that bread, He descended from heaven: This is the bread which cometh down from heaven.

**HILARY.** (de Trin. x. c. 18.) He calls Himself the bread, because He is the origin of His own body. And lest it should be thought that the virtue and nature of the Word had given way to the flesh, He calls the bread His flesh, that, inasmuch as the bread came down from heaven, it might be seen that His body was not of human conception, but a heavenly body. To say that the bread is His own, is to declare that the Word assumed His body Himself.

**THEOPHYLACT.** For we do not eat God simply, God being impalpable and incorporeal; nor again, the flesh of man simply, which would not profit us. But God having taken flesh into union with Himself, that flesh is quickening. Not that it has changed its own for the Divine nature; but, just as heated iron remains iron, with the action of the heat in it; so our Lord's flesh is quickening, as being the flesh of the Word of God.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvi. 20) The death here meant is death eternal. For even those who eat Christ are subject to natural death; but they live for ever, because Christ is everlasting life.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 1) For if it was possible without harvest or fruit of the earth, or any such thing, to preserve the lives of the Israelites of old for forty years, much more will He be able to do this with that spiritual food, of which the manna is the type. He knew how precious a thing life was in men's eyes, and therefore repeats His promise of life often; just as the Old Testament had done; (Exod. 20:12) only that it only offered length of life, He life without end. (Deut. 22:7) This promise was an abolition of that sentence of death, which sin had brought upon us. These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum; (1 Kings 3:14) where many displays of His power took place. (Ps. 21:4; 91:16) He taught in the synagogue and in the temple, (Prov. 3:2) with the view of attracting the multitude, and as a sign that He was not acting in opposition to the Father.

6:60–71

60. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

61. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

62. What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

63. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

64. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

65. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

66. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

67. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68. Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

70. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?

71. He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 2) Such is our Lord's discourse. The people did not perceive that it had a deep meaning, or, that grace went along with it: but receiving the matter in their own way, and taking His words in a human sense, understood Him as if He spoke of cutting of the flesh of the Word into pieces, for distribution to those who believed on Him: Many therefore, not of His enemies, but even of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is an hard saying, who can hear it?

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 2) i. e. difficult to receive, too much for their weakness. They thought He spoke above Himself, and more loftily than He had a right to do; and so said they, Who can bear it? which was answering in fact for themselves, that they could not.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 2) And if His disciples thought that saying hard, what would His enemies think? Yet it was necessary to declare a thing, which would be unintelligible to men. God's mysteries should draw men's attention, not enmity.

**THEOPHYLACT.** When you hear, however, of His disciples murmuring, understand not those really such, but rather some who, as far as their air and behaviour went, seemed to be receiving instruction from Him. For among His disciples were some of the people, who were called such, because they stayed some time with His disciples.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 3) They spoke, however, so as not to be heard by Him. But He, who knew what was in them, heard within Himself: When Jesus knew within Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you?

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi. 2) The revelation however of these hidden things was a mark of His Divinity: hence the meaning of what follows; And if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before; supply, What will ye say? He said the same to Nathanael, Because I said to thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these. He does not add difficulty to difficulty, but to convince them by the number and greatness of His doctrines. For if He had merely said that He came down from heaven, without adding any thing further, he would have offended His hearers more; but by saying that His flesh is the life of the world, and that as He was sent by the living Father, so He liveth by the Father; and at last by adding that He came down from heaven, He removed all doubt. Nor does He mean to scandalize His disciples, but rather to remove their scandal. For so long as they thought Him the Son of Joseph, they could not receive His doctrines; but if they once believed that He had come down from heaven, and would ascend thither, they would be much more willing and able to admit them.

**AUGUSTINE.** Or, these words are an answer to their mistake. They supposed that He was going to distribute His body in bits: whereas He tells them now, that He should ascend to heaven whole and entire: What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? ye will then see that He does not distribute His body in the way ye think. Again; Christ became the Son of man, of the Virgin Mary here upon earth, and took flesh upon Him: He says then, What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? to let us know that Christ, God and man, is one person, not two; and the object of one faith, not a quaternity, but a Trinity. He was the Son of man in heaven, as He was Son of God upon earth; the Son of God upon earth by assumption of the flesh, the Son of man in heaven, by the unity of the person.

**THEOPHYLACT.** Do not suppose from this that the body of Christ came down from heaven, as the heretics Marcion and Apollinarius say; but only that the Son of God and the Son of man are one and the same.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 3) He tries to remove their difficulties in another way, as follows, It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: that is to say, You ought to understand My words in a spiritual sense: he who understands them carnally is profited nothing. To interpret carnally is to take a proposition in its bare literal meaning, and allow no other. But we should not judge of mysteries in this way; but examine them with the inward eye; i. e. understand them spiritually. It was carnal to doubt how our Lord could give His flesh to eat. What then? Is it not real flesh? Yea, verily. In saying then that the flesh profiteth nothing, He does not speak of His own flesh, but that of the carnal hearer of His word.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tract. xxvii. s. 5) Or thus, the flesh profiteth nothing. They had understood by His flesh, as it were, of a carcase, that was to be cut up, and sold in the shambles, not of a body animated by the spirit. Join the spirit to the flesh, and it profiteth much: for if the flesh profited not, the Word would not have become flesh, and dwelt among us. The Spirit hath done much for our salvation, by means of the flesh.

**AUGUSTINE.** For the flesh does not cleanse of itself, but by the Word who assumed it: which Word, being the principle of life in all things, having taken up soul and body, cleanseth the souls and bodies of those that believe. It is the spirit, then, that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing; i. e. the flesh as they understood it. I do not, He seems to say, give My body to be eaten in this sense. He ought not to think of the flesh carnally: The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 2) i. e. are spiritual, have nothing carnal in them, produce no effects of the natural sort; not being under the dominion of that law of necessity, and order of nature established on earth.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii) If then thou understandest them spiritually, they are life and spirit to thee: if carnally, even then they are life and spirit, but not to thee. Our Lord declares that in eating His body, and drinking His blood, we dwell in Him, and He in us. But what has the power to affect this, except love? The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given to us. (Rom. 5:5)

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 2) Having spoken of His words being taken carnally, He adds, But there are some of you that believe not. Some, He says, not including His disciples in the number. This insight shews His high nature.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. s. 7) He says not, There are some among you who understand not; but gives the reason why they do not understand. The Prophet said, Except ye believe, ye shall not understanda. (Is. 7:9) For how can he who opposes be quickened? An adversary, though he avert not his face, yet closes his mind to the ray of light which should penetrate him. But let men believe, and open their eyes, and they will be enlightened.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 2) To let you know that it was before these words, and not after, that the people murmured and were offended, the Evangelist adds, For Jesus knew from the beginning, who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him.

**THEOPHYLACT.** The Evangelist wishes to shew us, that He knew all things before the foundation of the world: which was a proof of His divinity.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 7) And after distinguishing those who believed from those who did not believe, our Lord gives the reason of the unbelief of the latter, And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given him of My Father.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi. 2) As if He said, Men's unbelief does not disturb or astonish Me: I know to whom the Father hath given to come to Me. He mentions the Father, to shew first that He had no eye to His own glory; secondly, that God was His Father, and not Joseph.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 7) So then (our) faith is given to us: and no small gift it is. Wherefore rejoice if thou believest; but be not lifted up, for what hast thou which thou didst not receive? (1 Cor. 4:7.) And that this grace is given to some, and not to others, no one can doubt, without going against the plainest declarations of Scripture. As for the question, why it is not given to all, this cannot disquiet the believer, who knows that in consequence of the sin of one man, all are justly liable to condemnation; and that no blame could attach to God, even if none were pardoned; it being of His great mercy only that so many are. And why He pardons one rather than another, rests with Him, whose judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out.

And from that time many of the disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 3) He does not say, withdrew, but went back, i. e. from being good hearers, from the belief which they once had.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 8) Being cut off from the body, their life was gone. They were no longer in the body; they were created among the unbelieving. They went back not a few, but many after Satan, not after Christ; as the Apostle says of some women, For some had already turned aside after Satan. (1 Tim. 5:15). Our Lord says to Peter, Get thee behind Me. He does not tell Peter to go after Satan.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvi. 2) But it may be asked, what reason was there for speaking words to them which did not edify, but might rather have injured them? It was very useful and necessary; for this reason, they had been just now urgent in petitioning for bodily food, and reminding Him of that which had been given to their fathers. So He reminds them here of spiritual food; to shew that all those miracles were typical. They ought not then to have been offended, but should have enquired of Him further. The scandal was owing to their fatuity, not to the difficulty of the truths declared by our Lord.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. 8) And perhaps this took place for our consolation; since it sometimes happens that a man says what is true, and what He says is not understood, and they which hear are offended and go. Then the man is sorry he spoke what was true; for he says to himself, I ought not to have spoken it; and yet our Lord was in the same case. He spoke the truth, and destroyed many. But He is not disturbed at it, because He knew from the beginning which would believe. We, if this happens to us, are disturbed. Let us desire consolation then from our Lord's example; and withal use caution in our speech.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 3) This was the right way to retain them. Had He praised them, they would naturally, as men do, have thought that they were conferring a favour upon Christ, by not leaving Him: by shewing, as He did, that He did not need their company, He made them hold the more closely by Him. He does not say, however, Go away, as this would have been to cast them off, but asks whether they wished to go away; thus preventing their staying with Him from any feeling of shame or necessity: for to stay from necessity would be the same as going away. Peter, who loved his brethren, replies for the whole number, Lord, to whom shall we go?



**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. s. 9) As if he said, Thou castest us from Thee: give us another to whom we shall go, if we leave Thee.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 3) A speech of the greatest love: proving that Christ was more precious to them than father or mother. And that it might not seem to be said, from thinking that there was no one whose guidance they could look to, he adds, Thou hast the words of eternal life: which shewed that he remembered his Master's words, I will raise Him up, and, hath eternal life. The Jews said, Is not this the Son of Joseph? how differently Peter: We believe and are sure, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. s. 9) For we believed, in order to know. Had we wished first to know, and then to believe, we could never have been able to believe. This we believe, and know, that Thou art the Christ the Son of God; i. e. that Thou art eternal life, and that in Thy flesh and blood Thou givest what Thou art Thyself.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xlvii. 3) Peter however having said, We believe, our Lord excepts Judas from the number of those who believed: Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? i. e. Do not suppose that, because you have followed Me, I shall not reprove the wicked among you. It is worth enquiring, why the disciples say nothing here, whereas afterwards they ask in fear, Lord, is it I? (Matt. 26:22) But Peter had not yet been told, Get thee behind Me, Satan; (Mat. 16:23) and therefore had as yet no fear of this sort. Our Lord however does not say here, One of you shall betray Me, but, is a devil: so that they did not know what the speech meant, and thought that it was only a case of wickedness in general, that He was reprovng. The Gentiles on the subject of election blame Christ foolishly. His election does not impose any necessity upon the person with respect to the future, but leaves it in the power of His will to be saved or perish.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tr. xxvii. s. 10) He was elected to be an involuntary and unconscious instrument of producing the greatest good. For as the wicked turn the good works of God to an evil use, so reversely God turns the evil works of man to good. What can be worse than what Judas did? Yet our Lord made a good use of his wickedness; allowing Himself to be betrayed, that He might redeem us. In, Have I not chosen you twelve, twelve seems to be a sacred number used in the case of those, who were to spread the doctrine of the Trinity through the four quarters of the world. Nor was the virtue of that number impaired, by one perishing; inasmuch as another was substituted in his room.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xviii. 4) Mark the wisdom of Christ: He neither, by exposing him, makes him shameless and contentious; nor again emboldens him, by allowing him to think himself concealed.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

#### **6:57 The Living Father Sent Christ**

##### **Christ Is the Living Image of the Living.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Can lifeless copies be put on a level with their living originals? Can painted or carved or molten effigies be put on a level with the nature that they imitate? The Son is not the image of the Father after such a fashion as this; he is the living image of the Living. The Son who is born of the Father has a nature in no way different from his. And, because his nature is not different, he possesses the power of the nature that is the same as his own. The fact that he is the image proves that God the Father is the author of the birth of the Only Begotten, who is himself revealed as the likeness and image of the invisible God. And hence the likeness, which is joined in union with the divine nature, is indelibly his own because the powers of that nature are inalienably his own. On the Trinity 7.37.

##### **The Shared Being of the Father and the Son.**

Gregory of Nazianzus: All things that the Father has are the Son's. On the other hand, all that belongs to the Son is the Father's. Nothing then is unique to either one, because all things are in common. For their being [essence] itself is common and equal, even though the Son receives it from the Father. It is in this respect ... that it is said, "I live by the Father," not as though his life and being were kept together by the Father but because he has his being from him beyond all time and beyond all cause. On the Son, Theological 4(30).11.

##### **To Eat Christ?**

Augustine: The Lord and master was inviting his slaves, and the food he had prepared for them was himself. Who would ever dare to eat his own Lord and master? And yet he said, "Whoever eats me lives because of me." When Christ is eaten, life is eaten. Nor is he killed in order to be eaten, but he brings life to the dead. When he is eaten, he nourishes without diminishing. So do not be afraid, brothers and

sisters, of eating this bread, in case we should possibly finish it and find nothing to eat later on. Let Christ be eaten; when eaten he lives because when slain he rose again. Sermon 132a.1.

### **Christ Has the Father Within Himself.**

Hilary of Poitiers: So then he lives through the Father, and just as he lives through the Father we live through his flesh. For all comparison is chosen to shape our understanding so that we may grasp the subject we are treating with the help of the analogy set before us. Christ dwelling within our carnal selves through the flesh is the reason we have life, and we shall live through him in the same way as he lives through the Father. If, then, we live naturally through him according to the flesh, that is, if we have partaken of the nature of his flesh, must not Christ naturally have the Father within himself according to the Spirit since he himself lives through the Father? And he lives through the Father because his birth has not implanted in him an alien and different nature. This is because his very being is from the Father yet is not divided from the Father by any barrier of an unlikeness of nature because within himself he has the Father through the birth in the power of the nature. On the Trinity 8.16.

### **Not Only Life, but Eternal Life.**

Chrysostom: The “life” of which he speaks here is not merely life but the excellent life. For it is clear from this that he spoke not simply of life but of that glorious and ineffable life. For everyone lives, even unbelievers and the uninitiated who do not eat of that flesh.... And he is not speaking of the general resurrection either (for all alike rise again), but he is speaking of that special, glorious resurrection that has a reward. Homilies on the Gospel of John 47.1.

### **6:58–59 Eat This Bread and Live Forever**

#### **Length of Life versus Life Without End.**

Chrysostom: If it was possible without harvest or fruit of the earth, or any such thing, to preserve the lives of the Israelites of old for forty years, much more will he be able to do this, having come for a greater purpose.... He knew how precious a thing life was in people’s eyes, and therefore he repeats his promise of life often, just as the Old Testament had done. But the Old Testament only offered long life, whereas he offers life without end. This promise was an abolition of that sentence of death that sin had brought on us.... He said these things in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum, where many displays of his power took place.... He taught in the synagogue and in the temple, with the intention of

attracting the multitude and as a sign that he was not acting in opposition to the Father. Homilies on the Gospel of John 47.1–2.

### **The Heavenly Bread of Immortality.**

Romanus Melodus:

All the angels on high marvel at the affairs of earth

For earth-born men dwelling here below

Are exalted in spirit and reach what is on high

As they share in Christ, crucified.

For all together partake of His body,

As they eagerly come to the bread of life,

They hope for eternal salvation from it.

Even though visibly, to all appearances, it is bread

It sanctifies them spiritually because it is

The heavenly bread of immortality.

That the bread which we take is the flesh of the Immanuel,

The Master Himself was the first to teach us;

For when He voluntarily went to His Passion,

Christ broke the bread of salvation,

And said to His apostles, as it is written:

“Now draw near; eat of this,

And eating, you will receive eternal life,

For this is my flesh, this food,  
Since really, I whom you behold, am  
The heavenly bread of immortality.  
We all know, we who possess complete faith in Christ,  
That as we approach, eager for the mystic bread  
And in addition take the cup of salvation,  
If we are of pure heart and without dissimulation  
We are all participants of the flesh and blood  
Of Christ with faith in Him, and we hope  
From this a life like that of the angels;  
For, in very truth, the body of the One who suffered,  
The very holy body of Jesus Christ is  
The heavenly bread of immortality.

Kontakion on the Multiplication of Loaves 13.1–3.

### **6:60 What Jesus Says Is a Great Mystery**

#### **The People Do Not Perceive the Deeper Meaning.**

Augustine: If his disciples considered this a hard saying, what must his enemies have thought? But it was necessary that there would be some things that should not be understood by all. The secret of God should make people more eager and attentive, not hostile.... But the people did not perceive that what he said had a deeper meaning or that grace went along with it. Rather, receiving the matter in their own way and taking his words in a human sense, they understood him as if he spoke of the cutting of the flesh of the Word into pieces for distribution to those who believed on him. Tractates on the Gospel of John 27.2.

### **Looking for an Excuse to Leave.**

Chrysostom: They thought he spoke above himself, and more highly than he had a right to do. And so they said, "Who can bear it?" Perhaps they were making excuses for themselves since they were about to leave him. Homilies on the Gospel of John 47.2.

### **6:62 The Son of Man Ascending to His Previous Place**

#### **Son of God Always, Son of Man in Time.**

Augustine: For the Son of man is Christ, of the Virgin Mary. Therefore the Son of man began to be here on earth where he took on himself flesh from the earth. For this reason, in prophecy it had been said, "Truth has arisen out of the earth." What, then, does it mean, "When you see the Son of man ascending where he was before"? For there would be no question if he had said it this way: "If you should see the Son of God ascending where he was before." But when he said "the Son of man ascending where he was before," was the Son of man in heaven before the time when he began to be on earth? Here he said, "Where he was before," as if then he were not there when he was speaking these words. But in another place he said, "No man has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven: the Son of man who is in heaven." He did not say "was," but he said, "The Son of man who is in heaven." He was speaking on earth and said he was in heaven. And he did not say it this way: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven; the Son of God who is in heaven."

Where does this lead except that we understand—as also in my previous sermon I showed you, my beloved people—that Christ, God and man is one person, not two? In this way our faith is only a Trinity and not a quaternity. Therefore Christ is one, the Word, soul and flesh, one Christ; the Son of God and the Son of man, one Christ. The Son of God always, the Son of man in time, nevertheless, one Christ according to the unity of the person. He was in heaven when he was speaking on earth. So the Son of man was in heaven as the Son of God was on earth. The Son of God was on earth in the flesh he had taken, the Son of man was in heaven in the unity of person. Tractates on the Gospel of John 27.4.1–2.

## **6:63 The Spirit Gives Life**

### **Flesh Enlivened by the Spirit Has Great Value.**

Augustine: What, then, does it mean, “the flesh profits nothing”? It profits nothing, but [only] as they understood it. For, of course, they understood flesh as [something that] is torn to pieces in a carcass or sold in a meat market, not as [something that] is enlivened by a spirit. And so it was said, “The flesh profits nothing.” ... But he is talking there about that flesh that is alone by itself. Let spirit be added to flesh ... and it profits very much. For if flesh profited nothing, the Word would not have become flesh to dwell among us. Tractates on the Gospel of John 27.5.1.

### **Where Life Is, the Spirit Is.**

Ambrose: Learn now that as the Father is the Fount of life, so, too, many have stated that the Son is signified as the Fount of life. This is why he says that with you, almighty God, your Son is the Fount of life. That is the Fount of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is life, as the Lord says: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life,” for where the Spirit is, there also is life. And where life is, there is also the Holy Spirit. On the Holy Spirit 1.15.172.

### **Life-Giving Words.**

Cyril of Alexandria: [In this passage Christ is saying,] “It is not the nature of the flesh that renders the Spirit life-giving but the might of the Spirit that makes the body life-giving. The words then that I have spoken with you are spirit, that, is both spiritual and of the Spirit, and they are life.” Commentary on the Gospel of John 4.3.

### **The Word Sanctifies the Flesh.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Even the body of Christ itself was sanctified by the power of the Word made one with it, and it is thus endowed with living force in the blessed Eucharist so that is it able to implant in us its sanctifying grace.... For here too he says that the flesh can profit nothing, that is, to sanctify and quicken those who receive it, insofar as it is mere human flesh. But when flesh is understood and believed to be the temple of the Word, then surely it will be a channel of sanctification and life, not altogether of itself but through God who has been made one with it, who is holy and life. Commentary on the Gospel of John 11.9.

## **6:64 Jesus Knew Who Did Not Believe and Who Would Betray Him**

### **Jesus Knows Our Thoughts.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Jesus Christ knows the thoughts of the mind, as it is now, stirred by present motives, and as it will be tomorrow, aroused by the impulse of future desires.... By its virtue his nature could perceive the unborn future and foresee the awakening of passions yet dormant in the mind. Do you believe that it did not know what is through itself and within itself? He is Lord of all that belongs to others; is he not Lord of his own? On the Trinity 9.59.

## **6:65 One Who Is Granted by the Father Comes to the Son**

### **Faith Is a Gift.**

Augustine: He teaches us that even the act of believing is by way of being a gift and not a matter of merit: "As I told you," he says, "no one can come to me but whoever has been given it by my Father." If we call to mind the earlier part of the Gospel, we shall discover where the Lord said this. We shall find that he said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him." He did not say "leads" but "drags." This violence happens to the heart, not to the flesh. So why be surprised? Believe, and you come; love, and you are dragged. Do not regard this violence as harsh and irksome; on the contrary, it is sweet and pleasant. It is the very pleasantness of the thing that drags you to it. Isn't a sheep dragged, or drawn irresistibly, when it is hungry and grass is shown to it? And I presume it is not being moved by bodily force but pulled by desire. Sermon 131.2.

## **6:66 Many of Jesus' Disciples Left Him**

### **Truth Is Not Easy to Speak or Hear.**

Jerome: The medical men called surgeons pass for being cruel but really deserve pity. For is it not pitiful to cut away the dead flesh of another person with merciless knives without being moved by his pain? Is it not pitiful that the one who is curing the patient is callous to his sufferings and has to appear as his enemy? Yet this is the order of nature. While truth is always bitter, a pleasant disposition waits upon evil-doing. Isaiah goes naked without blushing as a type of the captivity to come. Jeremiah is sent from Jerusalem to the Euphrates (a river in Mesopotamia) and leaves his girdle to be marred in the Chaldean camp among the Assyrians hostile to his people. Ezekiel is told to eat bread made of mingled seeds and



sprinkled with the dung of people and cattle. He has to see his wife die without shedding a tear. Amos is driven from Samaria. Why is he driven from it? Surely in this case, as in the others, because he was a spiritual surgeon who cut away the parts diseased by sin and urged people to repentance. The apostle Paul says, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" The Savior himself found it no different. Many of the disciples left him because his sayings seemed hard. Letter 40.1.

## **6:67 Jesus Challenged the Twelve**

### **The Question Probes Their Motives.**

Chrysostom: Had he praised them, they would naturally, as people do, have thought that they were conferring a favor on Christ by not leaving him. By showing, as he did, that he did not need their company, he made them stick all the more closely to him. He does not say, however, "Go away," as this would have been to cast them off. Rather, he asks whether they wanted to go away. In this way, he prevented them from staying with him out of any feeling of shame or compulsion. Homilies on the Gospel of John 47.3.

### **No Compulsion.**

Athanasius: For it is the part of true godliness not to compel but to persuade. Our Lord himself does not employ force but offers the choice, saying to everyone, "If anyone will follow after me," and to his disciples in particular, "Will you also go away?" History of the Arians 8.67.

### **How Many Faithful.**

Cyril of Alexandria: For it is not the number of worshipers but rather those who excel in the right faith, though they are few, that are precious in the sight of God. Commentary on the Gospel of John 4.3.

## **6:68 Peter Believed in the Words of Eternal Life**

### **Who Could Be Any Better to Follow?**

Cyril of Alexandria: "To whom shall we go?" Peter asks. In other words, "Who else will instruct us the way you do?" or "To whom shall we go to find anything better?" "You have the words of eternal life"; not hard words, as those other disciples say, but words that will bring us to the loftiest goal, unceasing, endless life removed from all corruption. These words surely make quite obvious to us the necessity

for sitting at the feet of Christ, taking him as our one and only teacher and giving him our constant and undivided attention. He must be our guide who knows well how to lead us to everlasting life. In this way, we shall ascend to the divine court of heaven, and entering the church of the firstborn, delight in blessings passing all human understanding.

It is entirely self-evident that the desire to follow Christ alone and to be with him always is a good thing leading to our salvation. And yet, we can learn this from the Old Testament as well. When the Israelites had shaken off Egyptian tyranny and were hurrying toward the promised land, God did not allow them to march in disorder. The lawgiver [Moses] did not let each one go where he wanted to since, without a guide, they should undoubtedly have lost the way completely. ... They were ordered to follow: to set out with the cloud, to stop with the cloud and to rest with the cloud. When they stayed with their guide, then it was the Israelites' salvation, just as not leaving Christ is ours now. For he was with those people of old under the form of the tabernacle, the cloud and the fire....

They were commanded to follow and not undertake the journey on their own initiative. They were to set out with the tabernacle and stop with it, that by this symbol you might understand Christ's words: "Whoever serves me must follow me, so as to be with me wherever I am." When you are always in his company, it means you are resolute in following him and constant in holding on to him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 4.4.

#### **Peter Confesses the Resurrection.**

Chrysostom: [Peter's was] a speech of the greatest love, proving that Christ was more precious to them than father or mother. And that it might not seem to be said as a result of thinking that there was no one whose guidance they could look to, he adds, "You have the words of eternal life." ... These men already confessed the resurrection and all the apportionment that shall happen there. Homilies on the Gospel of John 47.3.

#### **6:69 The Twelve Believe and Know Jesus Is the Christ**

##### **We Believe in Order to Know.**

Augustine: For we believed in order to know. Had we wanted first to know and then to believe, we could never have been able to believe. What have we believed and known? "That you are the Christ

the Son of God,” that is, that you are eternal life and that in your flesh and blood you give what you are yourself. Tractate on the Gospel of John 27.9.

