

Cycle B 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When they stood in ranks before God, Joshua addressed all the people: "If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods. For it was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among the peoples through whom we passed. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The LORD has eyes for the just, and ears for their cry. The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Many are the troubles of the just one, but out of them all the LORD delivers him; he watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading 2 Eph 5:21-32

Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

Gospel Jn 6:60-69

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "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."

The readings today tell us that God loves us so much that He gives us the gift of faith so that at times in our lives when the road forks, so to speak, we can make difficult life choices that set our direction and affect every other decision we make...when we chose to serve God it is not a one-time decision, rather it is a choice we will repeat or deny many times.

Several weeks ago I was having dinner with some friends...three of us were Catholic and one was Hindu. My Hindu friend was educated in Catholic High School and College, so let's just say he knows first hand more about Catholic Christianity than I know about Hinduism. Some comments were made about how totally unbelievable Mormon and Islam teachings are. My Hindu friend spoke up and kind of stopped us in our tracks when he said "You know, Christians also have some pretty fantastic beliefs, such as Jesus being God." He was absolutely right and that is what today's Gospel is all about.

For the last several weeks we have been hearing Jesus say *"I am the living bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread shall live forever."* It is His divine origin as the Son of God that is the crux of the question perplexing the disciples, not the commandment to "eat my body and drink my blood." "This saying IS hard; who can accept it?" It surely isn't logic or knowledge or even human experience that causes us to arrive at our Christian faith. Rather it is the Spiritual part of us that enables us to accept Jesus for what He truly is...It is the spiritual part of us instilled by God that gives us the ability to believe..."It is the spirit that gives life."

As the Scriptures show, however, in spite of the fact that we have the gift from God to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we have the freedom to choose to be Christian, to be followers of Christ...or not. Who is it that we will serve and how will we respond? Are we Christians, quote-unquote, who do not respond to Christ? Like Joshua and the People of Israel, there are certain times in our lives when the day arrives that we must make or renew our choice...It may come at a time of crisis, such as a death or an natural disaster, it may come with spiritual growth during a SFC Bible study or at a Baptism, or it may pop into our everyday life, when we lose

our job or get pregnant. When these times come we discover the real priorities in our lives, what is of value and who it is that we choose to serve.

We parents seem to get more than our share of these times of discovery and choice...BTW I like to encourage younger parents: “there is life after teenagers.” One such time came crashing into our family. Our youngest son Matt called from college to tell us that his roommate fell 150 feet to his death off a cliff near their house! Immediately we had such a mixture of emotions: crushing sorrow for the family, concern for my son losing a close friend, relief that it wasn’t him and even anger that the accident happened because common-sense ignored the horrendous danger...it seemed that 10 or 12 students were at the cliff...It was night...they went there sometimes to talk...no alcohol was involved...they just liked to see the moon-lit valley...Scott slipped and was gone. I remember at the funeral the parent’s reactions: The mother was very angry with God that Scott died just as his young life was turning around after difficult teenage years...the father had a true sense of peace about him. Stunned, yes, but being comforted by God. I also remember the crowd of young people, many of whom were experiencing death of a friend for the first time, surrounding the parents with love. God, why do bad things happen to good people?

The life choices we make really determine the character of our relationship with God. When we commit ourselves to Jesus, we enter into a union with God that is deeper than anything we can imagine. But like Scott’s mother, at times we may get so angry with God that we feel that we can no longer walk with Him. When we journey with Jesus day-to-day and we come to these decision points, we may not understand or accept things happening around us, but why would we choose anyone else? Jesus is God’s Holy One. He has the words of eternal life. This saying is hard. Let’s choose to serve Him.