

AUGUST 26, 2015

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 [JOS 24:1-2A, 15-17, 18B](#)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM [PS 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21](#)

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

READING 2 [EPH 5:21-32](#)

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."

HOMILY:

There is a scandal in our family: terrible, heartbreaking, devastating news out of the Catholic church in Pennsylvania this month—a grand jury reported detailing the sexual abuse of nearly 1000 minors over some seventy years by Catholic priests—my brother priests. And, as we know, the crisis is not limited to Pennsylvania. It is embarrassing and shameful news that tempts me to want to distance myself from these priests and their wicked crimes—and yet, these priests remain my brothers. The depth of the harm that has been visited upon young people seems hopelessly irreparable and leaves one without adequate words. I can't find suitable words of comfort and consolation for these victims, especially when I represent the same priesthood that has caused such pain and harm. The words I am tempted to let loose are a stream of anger against the priest offenders and the church leadership that did not act decisively to protect our youth. And yet, at the end of the day, this long, painful time of sorrow, the Church remains my family and these priests are my brother priests. I can not flee. For this reason, when Jesus says to St. Peter, after the Lord's words that he is true flesh and blood for our life have scandalized some followers who then abandon the Lord, "Do you also want to leave?", St. Peter's reply seem the only fitting words in this painful time: "***Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.***" In our confusion and disorientation, we can find only One who can unravel our confusion and reset our orientation: Our Lord and Master Jesus, who alone has "the words of eternal life."

Since the church is where Jesus promised He could be found, and where He has in fact been ministered by countless good men and women throughout the ages, those who have betrayed the

trust of the “little ones” have disrupted trust in the goodness of God and have unleashed a profound crisis of faith, hope, and love, the very heart of one’s life in Christ. Above all, this crisis has been visited upon the victims, but also their families, and the wider family of faith that is the Body of Christ, the Church. **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” It is a crisis of faith:** Lord, you promised us that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, and yet the powers of hell seem so powerfully at work in our midst. We must believe that your grace and healing is more powerful than any power of darkness in our midst. **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” It is a crisis of hope:** Victims, whose trust was betrayed, have lost hope. And so have we. A healing of hope is needed. **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” It is a crisis of love:** What was represented as love was instead a wicked perversion of power and lust, that has left the victims confused as to what is this love of God we profess. And we are left with an anger at my brother priests that forces out love from our hearts. **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” And yet faith, hope and love endure.** When we return to the Lord in sorrow and confusion, we discover he waits to do what only He can do: heal and restore faith, hope and love.

There is a scandal in our midst and a resulting crisis of faith, hope & love among our family of faith. One thing we can do is respond to the invitation of our Holy Father Pope Francis to practice penance and prayer. These, he says, are a means to many good ends, for example: reparation for the sin and crime of sex abuse; spiritual medicine for things like lust or the thirst for power, which are often the root of other evils; a healing of wounded faith, hope and love; an opening of our eyes to the suffering of others, that contributes a strengthened conviction to do whatever is humanly possible to ensure the end of any form of abuse; and a fixing of our eyes on Jesus.” Through our prayer and acts of sacrifice/penance, may we turn from our flawed selves and to the Lord who can work a healing among us that is beyond our power. Let’s go now and fix our eyes on Jesus and pray for healing for the crisis of faith, hope and love that has been visited upon victims of sexual abuse and the larger body of the faithful, the Church.

I invite you to open your missalettes to #460. Together let us offer a time of silent prayer for victims of abuse in our midst and, because Jesus has commanded us to do so, let us pray for perpetrators of abuse, whether in the Church, in our families, in our community or anywhere in the world; and then let us call out in song for the healing that only God can give. May all experience a complete conversion of heart into the divine life of faith, hope and love. **“Master, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”**

[A minute of silence, followed by singing of “Meditation,” #460.]