

Homily Resources – 21st Week of Ordinary Time – 26 August 2018

Readings: 1st, Joshua 24: 1-2, 15-17; 2nd Ephesians 5:21-32; Gospel: John 6:55, 60-69.

1. Introduction: Choice! At this point in the teaching by Jesus concerning the Eucharist the people had to decide either for him or against him. Many left. The Apostles stayed. We, too, need to decide for Jesus. Discipleship can also have a lot to do with living our marriages correctly. The readings today boil down to choice, whom do we decide to serve? Will we choose God and others, or ourselves?

2. All three readings describe a fundamental choice. The **first** is the famous covenant renewal ceremony by Joshua, before the children of Israel enter the Promised Land. **The Epistle lesson** challenges us in our marriages to serve our spouse by being subordinate (obedient, submissive) to him/her instead of being preoccupied with ourselves. **The Gospel lesson** challenges us to accept and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus as saving power in the **Eucharist**. Serving God and others is critical to maintaining the family in today's society, and every time we receive the Eucharist, we should be strengthened in humility and a willingness to subordinate our desires and wants to the need of others, especially our spouse.

Let us turn to our readings and see how that deepens our understanding of our choices.

3. Scripture lessons: The first reading prefigures the choice that must be made by the disciples as Joshua challenges the people of Israel to decide whom they will serve. The covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua chapter 24 reminds us that the Eucharist is a covenant meal that calls for a decision of faith. What does it mean to choose to serve the Lord our God? In what areas of life must we be obedient (faithful)? Joshua's faith statement is one of the great declarations in the Bible. What a scandal if we receive the Eucharist

If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the river in Egypt or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. **As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD**" (Joshua 24:15).

Then he does not accept their first, positive answer, challenging them and warning them:

"You may not be able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God who will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If, after the good he has done for you, you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, he will do evil to you and destroy you" (v. 19-20).

And the people respond in faith, "We will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice."

The same is true for us in both the Eucharist and in marriage. There are consequences and difficulties. If our hearts become hardened we can cut ourselves off from God.

4. The second reading is the most descriptive of Christian marriage in the N.T. It challenges the Ephesian Christians to build Christian marriages on mutual submission and agape love. The verb tense used in Greek for "to be subordinate" (middle tense, neither active nor passive) indicates that this is a relationship between equal adults and that we are to do this out of self-interest (See also 1 Pet 3:18, 1 Cor 16:16). How many are the people I have talked with either in marriage or contemplating marriage who refuse to take up the guideline of "mutual submission."

5. In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges his Jewish audience to decide to accept him as the true Bread from heaven who gives his body and blood as their heavenly food. In this Eucharistic celebration, we, too, are called to make a decision, profess our faith in God's Son and renew the covenant ratified in his life, death and resurrection. This also applies to the moral directives of God. Do we stand with God or do we stand with the values of the world? This requires an act of faith. We are not to receive the sacred Eucharist unless we are willing to accept his morals and his way of life.

Jesus Christ requires his disciples to accept his words because it is he who has spoken them. This is what a supernatural "act of faith" involves, "whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which He has revealed are true; not because of the intrinsic truth of the things, viewed by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive (Vatican I, *Dei Filius* chap 3).

6. In the fourth part Jesus had said some very strong things about the Eucharist:

v. 51 – “and the bread that I will give is my *flesh* for the life of the world.”

v. 53 – “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 remains in me and I in him.” This was entirely unacceptable to his Jewish audience.

Then many disciples were murmuring about this, complaining strongly. Jesus will not back off nor soften his words. He meant what he said! This is why we must believe that in some manner the Eucharist must be the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus as an unbloody sacrifice in which we participate. The twelve Apostles in today's Gospel are asked to make a choice -- either to believe and accept the new covenant He offers in His body and blood, or return to their former ways of life. Let's first look at the Eucharist and then marriage.

7. Could Jesus have been speaking symbolically or metaphorically in this passage? No. Why not?

As we can see from other passages, sometimes Jesus spoke symbolically and was clearly understood to be doing so. On another occasion we can see that the disciples took him literally and he corrected them. So this time, when they understood that he was speaking literally, he did not tell them they were mistaken but that he meant what he had said. He let those who objected walk away.

“**I am the light of the world**; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). This is clearly not literal. Jesus is neither a candle, nor a light bulb nor the sun, but he does give spiritual light. The Pharisees understood his words as a testimony. Here the words of Jesus are symbolic but also real in a spiritual sense.

The death of Lazarus (John 11: 11-14). Here Jesus spoke in a figure saying, “Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him. So the disciples said to him, “Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved. But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, “Lazarus has died.”

8. Then let us note that all the accounts of the Last Supper have Jesus speaking literally. We can tell when Jesus is speaking literally by the authoritative teaching of the Church:

“There is no prophecy of Scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit,” (2 Pet 1:20).

We also must consider the testimony of the early Fathers of the Church. They consistently understood the Eucharist in the literal sense. See the resources in the on-line version of the notes.

9. In Jesus's description of the Holy Eucharist (John 6:60-69), we have an example of Jesus speaking literally and meaning it. When many said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it,” Jesus replied, “Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” Jesus then asked the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” Peter answered in faith, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” This shows us that in understanding the Holy Eucharist, we can choose either to be like the people who left or like those who stayed in faith.

10. In Relation to Marriage: We have to be prepared to live out this “mutual submission” in our marital covenant. Are we willing to be submissive or obedient to our spouse's needs or are we going to think first of ourselves? Are we committed to imitating Jesus in all our relationships, all the time?

11. In conclusion: To be good stewards or good disciples, we have fundamental choices to make which will guide our lives. Will we serve God and others, or will we serve ourselves first? Will we really commit ourselves to Jesus, especially in the Eucharist? Will we base our marriages on the values of God? Will we decide as did Joshua?

As Joshua said, “If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve...”

As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

1. Why does it make sense for us to believe what Jesus said literally?

Because Jesus is God and has the power to do this.

Because Holy Mother Church, with the authority of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, has always taught that the Holy Eucharist is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus

Because the Sacred Tradition and the Holy Fathers of the Church show us this.

This makes sense, if we can understand the difference between appearances (accidents) and the substance of things.

“I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep... I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” (John 10:7-9). Here it is clear that Jesus is not literally a gate swinging on its hinges, but he is the entry way to eternal life.

2. If we have difficulty with this, we can remember that the sacraments of God are also mysteries, having an aspect and an element which we cannot understand. We can remember the story of the healing of the young man who had an impure spirit (Mc 9:23-24). Jesus said to his father, “If you can! Everything is possible to one who has faith.” The father replied, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” We are the same way. We need to ask God for help to have a greater faith in the Eucharist.

An example of this is California’s former first Lady Maria Shriver Schwarzenegger who likes the “compassion and justice of Jesus Christ” advanced by her Catholic religion, but can’t abide the church’s positions on gays, divorce and a woman’s right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. She reveals this in a Washington Post interview. “I’m a cafeteria Catholic,” she declares, referring to her habit of following only Catholic teachings she believes in. “I consider myself a Catholic in good standing,” she added, even though “I don’t spend a lot of time squaring my own daily life with the institutional church.” What would Joshua say about her (and other liberal Catholic politicians)?

Have we decided to follow Jesus as revealed to us by Sacred Scripture and the Holy Mother Church? What are the hardest areas of belief for you? What is the one thing that you think the Lord wants you to get out of this Mass?

3. The testimony of the Fathers of the Church:

1. **St. Ignatius of Antioch** (Father of the Church, about 107 A.D.): “They remain separated (Docetists) from the Eucharist and prayer because they do not wish to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and was resurrected by the Father (Smym. 7,1).

2. **St. Justin Martyr** (Father of the Church, about 165 A.D.): The food converted in the Eucharist by the words of a prayer proceeding from (Jesus) – becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus who became flesh for us (1 Apol., 66,2).

3. **St. Irenaeus of Lyons** (Father of the Church, around 202 A.D.): The bread over which one makes the consecratory prayer is the Body of the Lord and it is the Chalice of his Blood” (Adv haer. IV 18, 4).

4. **St. Ambrose** (Father of the Church, around 370 A.D.): “This bread is bread before the sacramental words, but once it has been consecrated, the bread has been changed into the flesh of Christ. And before the words of Christ, the Chalice is full of wine and water, but once Jesus’s Words have worked, here is present the Blood of Christ, which redeemed his people (De sacr., IV, 5-25).

5. **St. John Chrysostom** (Father of the church, around 400 A.D.) “Let us in everything believe God, and gainsay him in nothing, though what is said be contrary to our thoughts and senses [...] Let us act likewise in respect to the [Eucharistic] mysteries, not looking at the things set before us, but keeping in mind his words. For his word cannot deceive” (*Hom. On St Matthew*, 82).

Questions for reflection:

1. Only the Catholic Church, among the western churches, understands fully the reality of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist. Let us give thanks for such a gift!
2. Since the Holy Eucharist is truly Jesus himself,
 - a. how should I prepare for the great privilege of receiving Him?
 - b. how should I live my life being in such a relationship with Jesus?
 - c. what in my life, actions, words, etc. are not fitting for one who is so united with Jesus?
3. How can we ever show enough thanks for such a grace and privilege for being able to receive Him in Holy Communion?