

Homily of 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

The second reading instructs us on how husbands and wives should treat each other, if there has to be a happy home. There has to be the spirit of complementarity. Love is at the root of all marriage. For the love to grow and last, each person has to do his or her part. Teddy Pendergrass' song, "So good to love somebody, when somebody loves you back," comes to mind. It takes two to tango. One good turn deserves another. If a marriage is shaking or wobbling, it means that someone is not doing his or her part of the covenant.

It is the same with our relationship with God. It is a covenant of love. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he (God) first loved us." The Book of Lamentation describes God's love in these words, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." St. Paul assures us that God is faithful. We are the ones that are unfaithful (2 Timothy 2:13).

The first reading is the conclusion of Joshua's final plea to the Israelites (Joshua Chapters 23 & 24). In these chapters, Joshua reminded the Israelites of God's love and faithfulness from the time of Abraham until their occupation of the Canaan Land. This reminder was necessary because some Israelites were worshipping the gods of the Amorites of the land the Israelites came to dwell. Joshua said to the people, "If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, ... the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling."

In the Gospel, many of Jesus' disciples returned to their former ways of life and no longer accompanied him. They found Jesus' teachings hard to accept. Jesus asked the apostles whether they wanted also to leave. Peter replied, "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."

Many people in our world are following the Amorite gods and are worshipping the gods in their pursuit of pleasure, power, money, wealth, knowledge and so on. Like the disciples who stopped following Jesus, the worshippers of worldly things see God's word as hard saying that cannot be accepted. According to St. Paul, they worship the creature but not the creator (Romans 1:25).

There are those who turned away from practicing Christianity because of challenges of life. Such people wonder, "Where is God's love in our suffering." Such people do not count their blessings. They count only their woes. There are those who have turned away from practicing their faith due

to the evil and scandal they experienced or they see others experience in the Church and in the world.

And there are people who reject God and his word by their life of violence and sin to themselves and to others, causing bloodshed and destruction of property.

Those of us who continue to believe and practice our faith, we say to Jesus as Peter did, "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." As we see in the second reading, our relationship with God is a covenant. Our relationship with God is as the Catholic wedding vow goes: "In good times and in bad, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

For us here in St. Francis of Assisi Church we remain with our God and continue to count our blessings in good or bad weather, in the church building, or under the tree, in the tent or in the Bakhita Center, in the garage or in the hall. We are strengthened by the words of St. Paul, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35-37).

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP