

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-17, 18; Psalm 34:2-3, 16-21; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6:60-69

In the first reading, the Israelites had occupied the land of Canaan. God had fulfilled his promise by bringing them to the Promised Land. God had led them out of Egypt, and granted them victory over many tribes and nations on their way. But that was not the end of the story. Another major challenge was to guide the Israelites to remain worshippers of Yahweh; and not turn to worship the Canaanites' gods. Joshua, their leader, summoned an assembly of the Israelites' leaders, judges, and officers at Shechem to renew their covenant with God. The people recommitted themselves, "For it was the Lord, our God, who brought us and our ancestors up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He performed those great signs before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among all the peoples through whom we passed... Therefore, we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God" (Joshua 24:17-18). The relationship between God and the Israelites after this event shows that the Israelites were unfaithful to their covenant with God.

Each of us can testify God's "great signs before our very eyes," and how he "protected us along our entire journey and among all the people whom we had passed." Along our journey, we have entered into covenants with God with our Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Matrimony, Holy Orders, promises, oaths and vows, and so on. How faithful are we to these covenants? Or, have we followed the Amorites' gods in our daily concerns and worldly pursuits? Do I put God first in my plans and activities? Do I have certain gods that I put first before God? God commands us, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

In the second reading, St. Paul speaks of the great mystery of marriage "in reference to Christ and the church." St. Paul wrote according to the patrilineal tradition and language of his time when he says, "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands..." and "For the husband is the head of his wife..." To spend time and energy in arguing about the semantics of the statements is a digression and missing the point. What is of more importance in today's reflection and celebration is how the reading points to our relationship and covenant with Jesus Christ. St. Paul explains the relationship and covenant: "Christ is the head of the church, he himself is the savior of the body." "The church is subordinate to Christ." "Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her..." "We are members of his body." Therefore, as St. Cyprian of Carthage urges us, let us prefer nothing to Christ, because he prefers nothing to us. We are invited to be true subordinates and ambassadors of Jesus by being Christ-like.

In the gospel, many of Jesus' disciples misunderstood him when he said to them, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53). They found Jesus' teachings hard to accept. They were shocked, and as a result they returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus asked the apostles whether they also wanted 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."

Jesus reveals to us how we leave him and return to our former way of life in his explanation of the parable of the sower: "The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit." (Matthew 13:18-23). What is the former way of life we have returned to, and why?

It, also, needs to be recognized that many people have walked away or are walking away due to all kinds of scandals within and around the Church and Christianity. But for us, who have remained steadfast and faithful, we are encouraged by the words of St. Paul, "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Romans 5:20). We declare like Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." We profess like Peter, "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." We proclaim like 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 things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35-37). Amen.

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