

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 peoples whom we had passed." Along our journey, we have entered into covenants with God through our Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Matrimony, Holy Orders, promises, oaths, and vows, and so on. How faithful are we to these covenants? Have we, like the Israelites, followed the 'Amorites' gods' in our daily concerns and worldly pursuits? Do we put God first in our plans and activities? Do we have certain 'gods' that we 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 uses the patrilineal tradition and language of his time to explain our relationship and covenant with Christ. "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands..." "For the husband is the head of his wife..." This means that we are to be subordinate to Christ, for he is our head. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her..." Christ loves us and died on the Cross for our sake.

Although St. Paul uses this passage "in reference to Christ and his Church," the passage is also used to encourage husbands and wives to submit to one another and love one another. The passage begins with "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). This means that submission is required from husbands and from wives. The statement, "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands" must never be used to justify abuses of wives by their husbands or to coerce wives to submit to abuses in their marriage.

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 his 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."

Many non-Catholics and some Catholics find Catholic beliefs, practices, and teachings hard to accept. For this reason, many leave the Catholic Church as many of Jesus' disciples left him. But for us faithful Catholics, we have come to believe, and we are convinced that the Catholic Church, as St. Paul affirms, is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone" (Ephesians 2:20). The Catholic Church was founded and established by Jesus Christ. He said to Peter, "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). Every other church was founded by human beings due to some reasons. While the strength and popularity of the human-founded churches depend and center on the capability and charism of their founders and leaders, all activities in the Catholic Church depend and center on Jesus Christ, the founder and establisher.

May God continue to empower the Catholic Church and all of us to continue to prevail at all times and in all circumstances. In the Catholic Church, may we continue to experience and testify God's great signs and mighty deeds. May God continue to protect us along our entire journey and among all the peoples whom we pass. Amen.

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