

## Weekend Readings & Reflections

### August 21-22, 2021 – Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Reflection:** *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. Their choice is prefigured by the decision Joshua asks the Twelve Tribes to make in today's First Reading. Joshua gathers them at Shechem—where God first appeared to their father Abraham promising to make his descendants a great nation in a new land (see Genesis 12:1–9). And he issues a blunt challenge: either renew their covenant with God or serve the alien gods of the surrounding nations. We too are being asked today to decide whom we will serve. For four weeks we have been presented in the liturgy with the mystery of the Eucharist—a daily miracle far greater than those performed by God in bringing the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. He has promised us a new homeland and eternal life, offering us bread from heaven to strengthen us on our journey. He has told us that unless we eat His Flesh and drink His Blood we will have no life in us. It is a hard saying, as many murmur in today's Gospel. Yet He has given us the words of eternal life. We must believe, as Peter says today, that He is the Holy One of God, who handed Himself over for us, who gave His flesh for the life of the world. As we hear in today's Epistle, Jesus did this that we might be sanctified, made holy, through the water and word of Baptism by which we enter into His new covenant. Through the Eucharist, He nourishes and cherishes us, making us His own flesh and blood, as husband and wife become one flesh. Let us renew our covenant today, approaching the altar with confidence that, as we sing in today's Psalm, the Lord will redeem the lives of His servants.*

### OPENING PRAYER

**Leader:** Welcome to our study for the Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time. Let us open in prayer:

**All:** Jesus, you are the true vine, and our Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in you that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit... As you remain in me, help me to remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can I unless I remain in you. You are the vine, I am a branch. Whoever remains in you and you in him will bear much fruit, because without you I can do nothing... By this is our Father glorified, that I bear much fruit and become your disciple. As the Father loves you, so you love me. Help me to remain in your love... You have told me this so that your joy may be in me and my joy may be complete. Amen. (Adapted from John 15)

**Leader:** While it may be uncomfortable to hear Jesus's words and thus be required to make a decision about following him, Jesus allows us to choose because of His love for us. True love means that we are free to choose Him or reject Him, although we will be infinitely happier if we choose Him. Regardless of our past sins, or the sins in which we are currently living, the Lord wants us to return to Him and choose Him above our worldly desires. As you reflect today, try to talk with Him honestly about following Him, and honestly ask yourself if anything is holding you back.

#### Daily Mass

In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus teaches us that he gives Himself to us as nourishment just as God gave the Israelites manna in the desert. They had no food and completely relied on God for the strength to live as they journeyed to the Promised Land. In the same way, we have no true nourishment other than Jesus Himself to grant us strength as we journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. He gives us this nourishment in the Eucharist.

When we experience the strength given to us in the Eucharist, then attending Mass only once a week begins to feel like not eating for six days out of the week. It is good to recognize our absolute need for Jesus in the Eucharist and to seek him there. Daily Mass is a beautiful gift from the Church that sadly many people ignore. Encourage others to try going to Mass more than once a week, and maybe even go as a group.

## **FIRST READING** ~ Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b ~

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When they stood in ranks before God, Joshua addressed all the people: "If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods. For it was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among the peoples through whom we passed. Therefore, we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

**Joshua leads God's people from their long journey in the desert (Exodus) into the 'promised land'. Shechem (meaning 'shoulder') is a very important geographical location and an ancient place of worship linked to Abraham. It is the entry point between two mountains. Today is truly a 'crisis - a 'decision' time: will they worship the local gods or Yahweh their LORD?**

- **Is there anything that stands out to you in this reading?**
- **We all place our lives down in service of something. What 'worship' temptations do you struggle with? What. Where. How. Who.... do you worship?**
- **Have you experienced in your life journey being led 'out of a state of slavery'? Being protected mysteriously along the entire journey of your life among many peoples...? What are some significant 'God moments' of your life journey? How might reflecting backward help you live forward?**

## **SECOND READING** ~ 2 Ephesians 5:21-32 ~

Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

- **A basic starting principle is being subordinate to one another because of our relationship with Jesus. This code of behavior is seeking unity. If the wife is to be in imitation of the bride the Church and the husband is to be in imitation of Christ, can you see how the typical cultural view of the time is being turned upside down? What challenges you personally in this new family code of behavior?**
- **Paul places the relationship of marriage into the beautiful mystery of the marriage relationship between Christ and the Church. In the celebration of the Eucharist the bodily language of love is expressed with the gift of Jesus' body and blood being received by the Church bringing a one-flesh Holy Communion. How could you make this reception special, more intimate, meaningful?**

## GOSPEL ~ John 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."

**Today is a crisis - decision time for disciples. Is Jesus a man with strange teaching or the "Holy One of God" teaching Truth? Accepting Jesus' words that He will give His Body and Blood is hard for them. They are shocked. Their minds and expectations cannot grasp this large and challenging truth. The mystery of God leading the heart and mind into belief is involved.**

- **Who and what has helped you in your journey of discovery of the Eucharist? Has your journey of faith reached a decision making step of belief in the real, true, substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? Do you believe?**
- **Is there anything that stands out to you in this reading?**

## MEDITATION

Why do some find it easier while others find it harder to accept the claims which Jesus made? Many were attracted to Jesus because He offered them something irresistible - a visible sign of God's mercy and favor which Jesus demonstrated in His wonderful works of healing, deliverance, and miraculous signs, including the multiplication of the loaves and fish when He fed the five thousand who had gathered to hear Him speak. Many stumbled, however, when Jesus made claims which only God can make. Jesus' discourse on "*eating his flesh and drinking his blood*" (see John 6:51-59) which pointed to the Last Supper, caused offence to many of His followers.

Jesus claimed to be the bread of heaven, the very life of God given to us as spiritual food to sustain us on our journey to our promised homeland with the Father in heaven. Jesus did not leave any middle ground for His hearers. They must either accept his word as divine or reject it as the claim of an imposter. Even the apostles admitted that this was a "hard saying". This expression meant that it was not just hard to understand, but hard to accept. Jesus pressed the issue with his beloved disciples because he wanted to test their faith and loyalty to Him as the Holy One sent from the Father in heaven. Jesus promised his disciples nothing less than the full blessing of eternal life and union with God. Jesus assures his disciples that it is His Heavenly Father who gives the invitation and the grace to believe and follow even in the "hard sayings". Jesus knew that some

would not only reject Him and His word, but would do so with violence fueled by hatred, envy, and even betrayal by one of His own disciples.

Jesus told his disciples that his words were "spirit and life" (John 6:63) - His words came from the heavenly Father who is the Author of life and the One who breathes his Spirit into those who believe in Him. Through the gift of faith Peter was able to receive spiritual revelation of who Jesus truly is - the Holy One of God, the eternal Son sent from the Father in heaven to redeem a fallen human race and reconcile them with God. How does God help us grow in faith and trust in His word, even the hard sayings which are difficult to understand? Faith is a gift which God freely gives to those who listen to His word and who put their trust in Him. Faith is a personal response to God's revelation of Himself. Faith is neither blind nor ignorant. It is based on the truth and reliability of God's word. True faith seeks understanding. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) said, "I believe in order to understand, and I understand the better to believe." The Lord Jesus offers all of his followers his life-giving word and Spirit to help us grow in our knowledge and understanding of God.

Paul the Apostle tells us that it is the work of the Holy Spirit who *enlightens the eyes of our heart and mind* to understand the truth and wisdom which comes from God (Ephesians 1:17-18). Faith is the key to understanding and experiencing God's action and work in our personal lives. Paul the Apostle tells us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). We can know God personally, and we grow in recognizing His voice as we listen to His word and obey His instruction.

- **Is there anything that stands out to you in this meditation?**
- **Do you believe, as Peter did, that Jesus has the *words of everlasting life* and the power to change and transform your life? Ask the Lord Jesus to increase your faith that you may grow in knowing, loving, and serving him as your Lord and Redeemer, Teacher and Healer, Master and Savior.**

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Leader:** In closing, let us now pray ...

**ALL:** Lord Jesus, you have the words of everlasting life. Help me to cast aside all doubt and fear so that I may freely embrace your word with complete trust and joy. I surrender all to you. Be the Lord of my life and the Ruler of my heart. May there be nothing which hinders me from trusting in your love and following your will. Amen.

**Leader:** (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

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[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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