

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
Year B: Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Ps 34; Eph 5:21-32; Jn 6:60-69  
August 22, 2021  
Fr. David Pignato

It must have been a dramatic moment, as we just heard in the Gospel, when Jesus asked the Twelve Apostles, “*Do you also want to leave?*” He had been announcing and explaining the truth of the Eucharist, when He said, “*[U]nless 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 has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink*” (Jn 6:53-55). But when He said this, many of His disciples said, “*This saying is hard; who can accept it?*” And, “*[a]s a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.*” So, Jesus turned to the Apostles and said to them, “*Do you also want to leave?*”

It was a moment of decision. The Apostles had to decide if they would continue following Christ, even if they did not completely understand what He was saying. After all, as we know, it was later, at the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Eucharist, that the Apostles got a better idea of what He meant when He said, “*[M]y flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*” But at the moment, they didn’t completely understand. But they had to make a decision: would they continue following Jesus, or would they leave and return to their former lives, as many others did?

And, it was St. Peter, the first pope, who replied on behalf of the Apostles. He said to Jesus, “*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.*” Peter was announcing his decision to stay with Christ, even if he didn’t understand exactly everything Christ was teaching.

In the first reading, we heard about another great moment of decision from the Old Testament. Joshua was telling the Israelites that it was time to decide, once and for all: would they believe in and be faithful to God, or would they turn away and follow other gods. Joshua addressed the people and said to them, “*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.*” And then Joshua announced his own decision: “*As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*”

Throughout our lives, there are many such moments when we have to make a decision about how we will move forward. And sometimes, we have to make

these decisions without understanding everything or having all the information we would like to have. People who get married and men who get ordained do this – they make commitments for life, without knowing what the future will hold. They make a decision about how to move forward in life and they commit themselves to it, without having all the information they might like.

The same is true for each of us in our faith. There are moments in life when we have to decide if we will remain faithful to Christ, or if we will decide to leave Him, as some of His disciples did when He started talking about the Eucharist. These moments might be major and dramatic, such as when we enter new relationships or make career decisions, or they might be as simple as deciding whether to get up and go to Mass on a Sunday, or go out for brunch instead.

Throughout our lives, each of us probably makes thousands, countless, decisions whether to keep going in our faith. And one decision always leads to another. Even small decisions to remain faithful add up to cement a lifetime commitment to Christ, and even small decisions *not* to follow Him can start a slippery slope away from the faith. The point is, our decisions can be loaded with consequences for our future, all the way to eternity. And, at these moments of decision, we should be honest about what we are deciding, as Joshua told the Israelites: we either stay faithful to Christ, or we decide to follow other, false gods that don't even exist. Often, we have to decide to remain faithful to Christ, even when others around us choose to leave Him behind.

Our Lord Jesus Christ made similar decisions. He used His free will to remain faithful to God His Father, even when He faced temptations to live for Himself. Shortly before His Passion, when He sensed His death was drawing near, Jesus said, *“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”* (Jn 12:27-28). It was a critical moment of decision, when Christ decided to remain faithful to God and His mission, even though there was reason to fear. And then, as His Passion began, with His agony in the garden, Jesus again felt the temptation to withdraw, but He once again made a critical decision to continue, when He said, *“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will”* (Mt 26:39). Time and again, Jesus chose to remain faithful, and His example should inspire us to do the same. So, if ever we face the temptation and hear Christ say to us, *“Do you also want to leave?”*, let us pray that we would be ready to answer with the words of St. 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.”*