

Commentary to the Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time

John 6 Part 5 - The Choice Is Ours



The battles were over. The promised land was won. There were no enemies left strong enough to route the Hebrews from the land. Now, the people who had defeated Jericho and beyond needed to establish their lives. But if they were safe from the attacks of pagans, they were not safe from the culture of the pagans. Their fathers had been attracted to pagan cultures and many had followed them before the crossing of the Jordan. Those were the gods beyond the river that Joshua referred to. Right now the Hebrews were living in land conquered from the Amorites. The pagan rituals, the feasts, the immorality, all attracted them. A latter people would say, "When in Rome do like the Romans." Should the Hebrews live like the Amorites, should they live like the people of Jericho? "The choice is yours," Joshua says in the first reading from the final chapter of the Book of Joshua. But Joshua knows what he is going to be doing. He says something that should be the theme of every family living in a materialistic and pagan world, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." The long teaching on the Eucharist was over. Jesus had not covered His message in terms that could be open to interpretation. He did not say, "I am speaking symbolically here." He did not say, "This is like my flesh." He said, that the Bread He would give is His flesh." His followers needed to eat His Body and drink His Blood. He even used words for eating that meant to grind up with your teeth. "This is hard to take," some of the disciples complained. "People are leaving you," the disciples moaned. "The choice is yours," Jesus responds. "Will you leave too?" And then Peter, like Joshua, makes a great profession of faith. "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 and Joshua, the Hebrews who heard Jesus speak, and the ancients who followed Joshua into the Promised Land, were certainly not the only ones facing a choice. In the early days of the Church, Christians had to choose following Christ or losing their possessions and even their lives. This continues in various areas of the world in our own time. Some of our young people wear a shirt with a cross on it and the saying, "This shirt is illegal in 53 countries." The priests we have been graced to have here from India, Fr. Mathew and Fr. Thomas would tell us stories of Christians who would be beaten or killed by radical Hindus in various areas of India. Now Christians throughout Asia are persecuted by ISIS or its affiliates. Christians living in areas and countries where the faith is persecuted are faced with choosing the Lord daily. The choice is there, and they accept the Lord regardless of the implications of their choice. The choice is also presented to us, and presented to us daily. Are we to take the leap of faith and choose the Lord even when He asks us to believe in that which is impossible for the mind to come to, or do we leave for an easier, less challenging faith? Are we to accept living the Law of the Lord as presented by our faith, or are we to join in with the materialist lifestyle of the world?

Are we to live a moral life, or join those who mock all who are committed to the Lord? The choice is there for us. Like Peter, we have to realize that no one else has the words of eternal life. Like Joshua, we have to decide to follow the way of Lord. That means that we are called to stand apart from those elements of society that make noises as though they are the enlightened majority. They are neither, neither enlightened nor a majority. The so-called intelligentsia who see good in every evil, in every perversity, are foolish. In their deification of political correctness, they have demanded a society where all morality is subjected to the glorification of the individual. Their only morality is relativism. They admit no rules regarding right or wrong, everything depends on the person's desires. "That which is right for one person can certainly be wrong for another," they would assert. For them there are no values such as fidelity, honesty, and basic respect. Everything is relative. As a result they really cannot have a society. The enlightened intellectuals of this ilk are basically foolish. And they ask us to join them. Worse, they demand that we join them. It is there for us. Do we go along with what supposedly everyone is saying is now acceptable, or at least now acceptable for us, or do we choose the way of the Lord? Like Joshua, we have to hold on tight and declare, "As for me and my family, we will follow the Lord." Many people are still asking the Lord to tone it down some. "OK, Lord," they say, "I know abortion is wrong, I know infidelity is wrong, I know stealing is wrong, but maybe in this case, in that case, it is acceptable."

Many times people will demand from me and other priests that we tone down the teaching of the Church. Many priests have attempted to do so, to their discredit. They have done damage to their people. For example, I have had people come to me and say that they have been living in guilt for years. They were never married in the Church, but when they went to a priest, he told them not to worry about it. He toned down the teaching of the Lord, and his people suffered from this. Parents and grandparents often do something similar regarding their children and grandchildren. "Oh, your living together. Isn't that nice." And another relationship is condemned to a questionable marriage if

marriage is even approached. Jesus would not tone down His teaching. Who are we to tone it down for Him? We need to be committed to a following of the Lord that some would call radical, but in reality is simply authentic. Our need is based on the One who is calling us to faith. It is Jesus Christ. If we refuse to follow Him, where exactly can we go? Whom can we follow? Who else has the words of eternal life?

Are we convinced that Jesus is the Holy One of God? We say we are. But if we are really convinced, then we really have no choice. Eternal Life can only be found in Him. The conclusion of John 6 is far more than a call to believe in the Eucharist. It is this, but it is more. It is a call to trust in the Lord. It is a call to dare to be different from those who have left him and who give lip service to their Christianity. We are called to be different. We are called to be holy, for, after all, that is what holiness is, being separate for the Lord. We have a choice.....Or do we? No, we really don't have a choice. Where else can we go? He alone has the words of eternal life.

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