

A Time for Choosing . . .

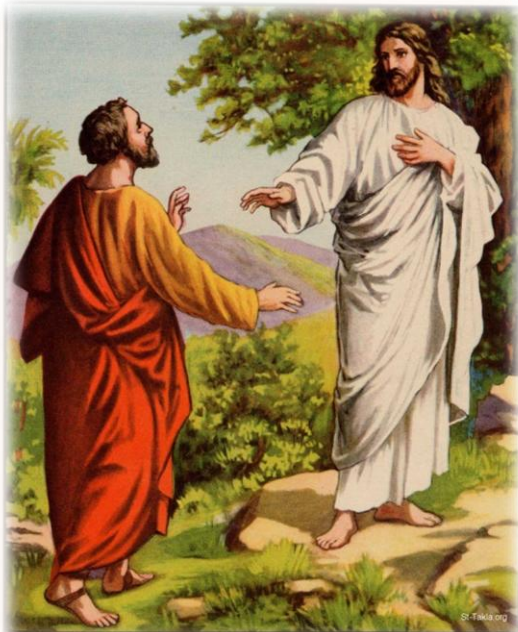
21st Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17
Psalms 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

Ephesians 5:21-32
John 6:60-69

At key points in the Holy Scriptures people are given an opportunity to choose. After a clear, sometimes moving, and often tumultuous experience of God, they are given a chance to decide who they are, where they are going and where their loyalties lie – with sin or grace, with slavery or freedom, with the God of their fathers or the gods of the pagans.

One such time is found in the Book of Joshua. After the Hebrew conquest of the Promised Land, after wandering in the desert for forty years following their liberation from Egypt by the mighty hand of God, the people of Israel are given a choice: “decide today whom you will serve.” Joshua, whose leadership won for God and his People the land of the Amorites, makes his choice clear: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”



In the Gospel of John, the Apostles are faced with a similar choice. Jesus gives His followers the promise of eternal life for those who “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood”, a teaching so central to our faith that we celebrate it Sunday after Sunday as the source and summit of our life as Catholics. In the Gospel, however, we are given the people’s reaction – they leave. Finding this teaching too hot to handle, too difficult to accept – a teaching that Jesus knows shakes their faith – they abandon the man they once proclaimed a prophet, leaving him alone with the Twelve.

To this mass exodus, Jesus gives a response. Just as important, however, is what He does *not* say.

Jesus does *not* say, “Wait, come back! I will change that teaching so you won’t leave.” He does *not* say, “Maybe I was too rigid, too unbending. I should be more open to disagreement and other ‘opinions’.” He does *not* say, “I guess I am too conservative for this more liberal group and should go more with the times to attract people rather than drive them away.” He does *not* say, “I guess I should take note that the majority of my followers don’t agree with that particular teaching.” Instead, Jesus turns to the only Twelve remaining of a multitude of five thousand and asks, “Do you want to leave me too?” In the face of the majority abandoning Him, Jesus gives His closest companions a choice – stay or leave.

In response, Peter does not seek to finesse, or persuade Jesus to adjust this teaching so as to be more popular, attractive,

A Time For Choosing

or appeasing to a stubborn, easily agitated crowd. Rather, undistracted by what “everybody else” does, Peter responds on behalf of his associates “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Despite his own lack of understanding, Peter professed his choice, “. . .you are God’s holy one.”

The Church was established by Christ on the foundation of those Twelve who did not abandon Him, to maintain, profess and pass on the universal truths of faith. These truths touch us personally, socially and even morally. They often call us to a complete change in outlook, lifestyle and loyalty. At times they so shake our

popular sensitivities that, for some, they even shake our faith. As in the Gospel stories, many choose to abandon Christ because of an unpopular teaching, a homily we don’t like, a priest (or archbishop) whose leadership challenges us, just as Jesus challenged His own multitude of followers. In the midst of this Jesus presents to us all a time for choosing; asking each of us, in a very personal way, “are you going to leave me to?”

Fr. William C. Nicholas
Catholic San Francisco
August 24, 2012