

21st Ordinary Sunday
August 22, 2021
“Lifelong Commitments”

Jos 24:1...18
Eph 5:25-32
Jn 6:60-69

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Personal commitment is one of the most challenging aspects of every person’s life. Commitments can be short-term or long-term depending upon what is involved. And a life-long commitment is the most daunting challenge of all!

A person does not enter into a life-long commitment without serious consideration. Not to do so is to run a very high risk of failing in that commitment. Moreover, often, there is great harm to others when we renege on a commitment.

Nevertheless, no matter how much thought and study we give to a personal commitment, we can never foresee all that it will entail and demand of us. Every permanent commitment will challenge us in ways we never thought possible. When things become difficult, we will be tempted to give up – to quit – to walk away. Yet, it is then that great breakthroughs of growth can take place. But we must remain faithful and persist in our original endeavor.

Marriage is, perhaps, the best understood example of what I have been saying. The priesthood or the vowed religious life are others. All three are meant to be life-long journeys of growth. They are ways of serving God and the human family during our personal lifetime here.

Sadly, though, 50% of marriages in America end in divorce. Fewer and fewer people are entering the priesthood and religious life – no doubt because of what those vocations clearly demand. And more and more couples are just living together in order to escape all that a true commitment of marriage entails!

The scriptures for today teach us about the most fundamental commitment that everyone must make and have. It is our commitment to God. God created us out of His goodness and His love. There is, necessarily, a bond between Creator and creature – between God and ourselves. But we must freely and willingly embrace that bond – Because God does not force anyone to love Him or serve Him in return for that love.

Joshua knew that human nature was weak and fickle. So, today, he presents the Chosen People with the same choice that we all must make. Choose the Lord God! Or – choose the pagan gods of the world – the culture, the flesh, and the devil himself. Furthermore, there can be no compromise – no half measures – no fence straddling – no serving both sides!

Fortunately, the people made the right choice. However, succeeding generations would fail – and some generations would fail in the worst possible ways. Thus, again and again, they paid the price for their unfaithfulness. And only the mercy of God with His own faithfulness nourished the seed of hope in the hearts of those few who did remain faithful!

Jesus was the salvation that God promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant made with the Chosen People at Sinai. Jesus is the God-Man who joins God to us – and ourselves to God. Jesus brings the New Covenant of divine commitment to us. Jesus says “Yes!” on our behalf to the embrace of God’s love.

However, we must choose to be one with Jesus. We must join ourselves to him in order to be joined to God. And Jesus makes this possible in many ways – but most especially in the Eucharist – in the Bread and Wine of his Body and Blood!

In today’s Gospel of John, we learn that many of the original disciples of Jesus walked away. They could not make the permanent, life-long commitment of faith! The words of Jesus were too much for them. They wanted a commitment on their own terms – one that was palpable and real – one that was of this world and the gods of their culture and their anti-Roman politics!

It must have been a great number of those early believers who walked away. Jesus must have been disheartened. So he asked the Twelve if they would leave as well. And Peter replied for them all. Even though they understood so little at that point – Even though they could not fathom the mystery of what would become the Eucharist – They, nevertheless, had faith – authentic faith. They had a permanent, life-long commitment to Jesus. And they would remain faithful despite their sins and mistakes! Jesus truly was the Holy One of God! Jesus truly had the words of everlasting life! Where else on earth could they possibly go?

Brothers and Sisters, today, Jesus also teaches us that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them. God does not waste grace. But I believe that grace is there for us if we ask for it. Anyone can ask for the grace to come to Jesus. Can the Father refuse grace to anyone who truly seeks Jesus and the Father who sent him? I think not!

So, let us pray, today, that the Holy Spirit guides us at every step of our life-long commitment to the Father, the Son, and the same Holy Spirit!

Amen.

August 22, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra