

21ST SUNDAY ORD. (B)! CHOOSE JESUS AND HAVE LIFE!

In our lives, we make choices every day, what to eat, what clothes and shoes to wear, friends to move with, cars to drive, whom to marry, and even in the Church, where to sit. All these choices affect our lives in one way or another; but the most important choice to make is what the readings of today draw our attention to, whether to worship God or the gods of the Gentiles; to follow Jesus or leave Him, and how to live with the partner we have chosen to live with for life.

After the Israelites had settled in Canaan, Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel and asked them to make a choice between God and the gods. This was a way of renewing the covenant God made with their ancestors, Abraham and Moses. He made it clear to them that he and his family had already decided to follow the Lord. The people also decided to follow the Lord because of what He had done for them and their forefathers. They recounted the great things God had done for them.

Jesus talked at length about His Body as food and His Blood as drink. The Jews complained and quarreled among themselves about that teaching. It was time for them to make a decision, and as we heard, many of the disciples left Him. Why? Because it was a hard saying for people to accept.

He then turned to the Twelve and asked them whether they also wanted to leave, but Simon Peter, as usual, spoke on their behalf that they had no where to go, because they had come to believe that He has the words of eternal life. They were convinced that He is the Holy One of God. They felt secure by following Jesus. Their response was similar to the response given to Joshua by the Israelites. They all recalled the marvelous things the Lord had done and they were convinced that following the Lord was and is the best choice to make. The disciples who left did not understand Him and they were only looking just at the physical aspect of Christ's teaching and not connecting it to the spiritual as well. That was why He told them that, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life".

The Israelites had already been called by God to be His own people; why

then did Joshua ask them whom they would follow? There is one thing to be part of the group and another thing to be faithful to the principles of being a member. He wanted to know how loyal they were to God. That was why Jesus once told His disciples: “Many are called but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14). Our presence here may be that we have decided to follow Jesus and worship Him, but are we indeed faithful followers? Are we not advocating for the teachings of Christ and the traditions of the Church to be watered down to suit the way we want to live our lives? Many of us are not different from the Jews who quarreled about Christ’s teachings, and later left.

“It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life”. “The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship Him” (Jn.4:23). These are the words of Christ to those who want to follow Him. Many are physically present here now, but spiritually bankrupt.

We take Communion every day but it may not benefit us because we do not receive Jesus worthily, as St. Paul told the believers in Corinth; (1Cor. 11:27-30). We do not worship in Spirit and in truth. Many of us are just fulfilling the obligation. We have compromised our faith with what is surrounding us and we are reaping the fruits. From the top to bottom of the ladder of Catholics, many of us are just performing functions; we are not worshipping God. We are not led by the Spirit. That is why many teachings of the Church are now difficult for us to obey. We pick and choose what suits us and shun the ones that should direct our lives to God. We say directly or indirectly: “This saying is hard; who can accept it”.

Married couples are also reminded to be faithful to and love their partners as Christ loves the Church. How has Christ been part of your marriage, and how have you lived your married life in the way the Lord wants you to live? You made a choice to live with him or her for life; do you think your marriage has been a Spirit-filled one?

Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan, this was what God told them: “Look, today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you

obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I am laying down for you today, loving Him and walking in His ways, and keeping His commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous....If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish” (Dt.30:15-18a). It is time to ask ourselves whether we are convinced about the choice we have made to be Catholics and how faithful we are to this decision. If I have decided to follow Jesus, then I have to put the world behind me and focus on Jesus and do His will.