

[Readings: Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Psalm 34; Eph 5:21-32; Jn 6:60-69]

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

In our First Reading, Joshua gathers the nation together at the end of their years of wandering. The Promised Land awaits, as well as a new season of stability, prosperity, and hope. But one thing needs to be determined before the nation takes root on the soil: Who is their God? Whom will they serve?

It’s no idle question; actually, it’s an idol question. Most ancient peoples worshipped the god of the land, and each god was considered attached to his or her particular patch of ground. The powers of Egyptian religion and magic had been no match for this God, nor had the desolation of the desert years. But now as the people stood poised on the brink of a new world, full of Canaanite gods and well-established cults that worked just fine, should they bank on the God that had delivered them thus far, or would it be more practical and politically correct to adopt the tried-and-true gods of Canaan?

The nation before Joshua was composed of sons and daughters of those who had once stood before Moses and addressed a similar moment of decision: “I set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.” It may seem like a false choice: Who would choose death and the curse that goes with it? But we who live in the modern culture of death, as Pope Saint John Paul II termed it, are in no position to scoff at the question.

Many of us choose the way of death, and most of us suffer under the curse that emanates from it. Our children inherit a world in which gross inequality, violence, poverty, abortion, irresponsible genetic research, environmental negligence, and war are all givens. We now even question what it means to be male and female, and we redefine marriage to our own twisted tastes. The love of money and power has replaced the love and respect for life. And as every generation learns to its sorrow, there is a point where there is no turning back.

“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”

Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray Him. “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.” “Do you also want to leave?” “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.”

Everything Jesus says or does in the Gospels is intended to lead us to the moment of decision where we choose Him or we refuse Him.

Surely we have choices to make every step along the journey of faith as His disciples. Come follow or stay behind. Seek peace or take up the sword. Serve God or money. Build on rock that lasts or on sand that slips away. Tend to the dead or choose the way of life. Open your eyes or remain blind. Get up and walk or stay where you are. Go up to Jerusalem or return to Galilee. Seek the Kingdom or settle for the world. Either we are for Christ or against him. Jesus doesn't allow a shift into neutral or a response of “no comment.” And let's be clear: Any decision we make has consequences, good or bad.

Look at how we still may be still “slaves” to our past, our resentments, our addictions, our bad habits. The only unacceptable answer to the challenge of faith is to say, “yes” one minute and then go and do “no” the next. The decisive question continues to be posed because each new generation has to address it. We can be baptized and still say “no.” We can receive our First Communion and have our faith ratified at Confirmation and still say “no.” We can journey with Jesus as members of His Church and determine one day that we'll go no further.

We can be faithful churchgoers all our lives yet at the critical hour, when our testimony is called upon, we may waffle and stammer and look away, making a lie of it all. “Are you with me or do you want to leave?” Jesus asks. Saint Peter's answer remains the best, but we can only repeat it if we mean it.

Is the Eucharist real for you? Are the Church teachings about Jesus in the Eucharist true? Jesus says it plainly: “This is My Body! This is My Blood!”

Do you realize what we have here, folks? Do you realize what you are receiving here? Do you let what is here transform you? Your body and blood are mixed with His! Your soul is united with His soul!

If we really believe in the Eucharist and the other beautiful teachings of the Church, then one doesn't walk away when the situation gets really tough.

Eating Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament should change us, transform us, and leave its mark. It should be clear to the forces of evil, to the world, to our neighbors, and to ourselves that our decision to consume the Bread from Heaven is a powerful thing that leads to action.

Life is here. Love is here. Challenge is here. The Cross is here. Forgiveness is here. The choice is ours. The choice begins when we are dismissed from Mass and walk to the church parking lot. A sign above the main exit of a Pentecostal church reminds us: "You are now entering mission territory."

Just a final word on the place of the family, especially based on today's Second Reading. St. Paul says that the head of a married couple and of the family is the husband/father. But as I also heard a wise woman say, "The man may be the head, but the woman is the neck, and the neck moves the head."

Parents are called to be steady, righteous examples to your children so that the children can develop spiritually, morally and physically. Children are a gift from God and not the property of parents. This is contrary to when Roseanne says on her show, "These kids are the only thing we own outright." No, they are "on loan" from God. And parents will stand in judgment as to how they treat these gifts. A Christian Catholic family should be a miniature Church.

Family members teach each other and strengthen each other in faith and they outdo each other in acts of charity. They pray for and with each other. They can learn the faith of their ancestors. And the Body of Christ is again born again and risen again and lives again for another generation! "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." AMEN!