

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

“Decide today whom you will serve: the Lord your God, or the gods of the pagans.” These were the last words of Joshua to the Chosen People. Their response? “Far be it for us to forsake the Lord.” But guess what? After the death of Joshua, the Israelites DID forsake the Lord. After a while, their spiritual enthusiasm petered out, the flame of faith snuffed out, and like many of the disciples of Jesus, “they returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him.”

The theologian Rudolf Bultmann didn’t start it. But he was the one who stated it most memorably. Everything Jesus says or does 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 serve 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 us to shift into neutral or give 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 “slaves” to our past, our resentments, our addictions, our bad habits. The only unacceptable answer to the challenge of faith is to say, “yes” HERE and then go out and do “no” THERE.

“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.” They went back to their former lives. As if Jesus never existed. As if Jesus made no impression on them or on their lives, other than feeding them a Happy Meal. To me, this is the saddest verse in the Gospel of John. How sad indeed.

The decisive question continues to be posed because each new generation has to address it. All generations here at Mass today have 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 stop practicing the Catholic Faith. Also, we can be faithful churchgoers all our lives, yet at the critical hour, when we must stand up and speak out, we may waffle and stammer and look away, or remain silent, making a lie of it all.

“Are you with Me or do you also want to leave?” Peter’s answer remains the best, but we can only repeat it if we mean it. Peter says: “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.” “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Life is here. Love is here. Challenge is here. The cross is here. Forgiveness is here. The choice is ours.

Do you realize what we have here, folks? Do you realize what you are receiving here when you receive Holy Communion?

Do you let what is here transform you? Your very body and blood are mixed with His! Your very 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 tough.

We are to take the Body and Blood of Christ, which we have received HERE and bring it out THERE. We are to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are to be the eyes and ears, the hands and feet, the heart and soul of Jesus. The best compliment we can receive from strangers, from pilgrims, from atheists and from fallen away Catholics is: “See how they love one another!” “See how they help the poor.” “See how they teach their children.” “See

And, to me, most importantly, “I want what YOU have!”

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 eat the Bread from Heaven is a powerful thing that leads to action.

We can choose, or we can refuse. If we refuse, then we lose!

Just a final word on the place of the family, especially based on today's Second Reading. We forget how it starts. St. Paul says couples are equals! "Brothers and sisters, be subordinate to ONE ANOTHER." But then what he says next is NOT equal. It's not balanced.

Wives should respect their husbands as head of the household, but husbands are expected to give up their very lives for their wife and family. As Christ gave up his life for HIS bride, the Church.

So, if I had to choose between respecting a higher authority and giving up my very life, as the expression goes, "I'll take vanilla!"

Husbands and wives are equal, but not identical. If you are married, then you have learned that indeed, as the book title says, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus!"

We hear that the head of a married couple and of the family is the husband/father. But 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 their 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 in contrast to the Roseanne television show when she says, "these kids are the only thing Dan and I own outright." No, Roseanne, these kids" are "on loan" to you from God.

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. One priest always says in his wedding homilies that husbands and wives are called to get each other into Heaven. They pray for and with each other. They can learn the faith of their ancestors. And the Body of Christ is born again and risen again and lives again for another generation!

Many questions to ponder this week. See which one speaks the most to your heart:

What decisive moments have you had in your life? What made you choose the path you took? What were the consequences of that choice?

Psalm 34 tells us that God is close to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. How have you experienced that truth in your life?

Authority and obedience are key concerns in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. What struggles do you have with authority and obedience?

And finally, the apostles believe Jesus has the words of eternal life. Do you? Why do you stay with Jesus and accompany Him?

Choose or refuse and lose!

"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." AMEN!