

21st Sunday of the Year B

First Reading Joshua 24:1-2.15-18

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem; then he called the elders, leaders, judges and scribes of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Then Joshua said to all the people: "If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living. As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord." The people answered, "We have no intention of deserting the Lord and serving other gods! Was it not the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed? We too will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

Second Reading Ephesians 5:21-32

Give way to one another in obedience to Christ. Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church submits to Christ, so should wives to their husbands, in everything. Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because it is his body – and we are its living parts. For this reason, a man must leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one body. This mystery has many implications; but I am saying it applies to Christ and the Church.

Gospel John 6:60-69

After hearing his doctrine many of the followers of Jesus said, "This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?" Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, "Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, "This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him." After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, "What would you, do you want to go away too?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God."

Meditation

After Jesus' discourse on the bread of life, disbelief wins over even some of the disciples, who refuse to walk with him any longer. Jesus, however, will not relinquish the demand for faith. But he points out the futility of trying to achieve by human power what is possible only to God. He repeats the opposition between imperishable and perishable found in the introduction to the discourse (cf. Jn 6:27). "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless." The work of the disciple is faith; life is the gift of God. "Do you want to leave me too?" This poignant question drives us to take our stand with regard to Jesus: are we going to join the disbelievers or the Twelve? "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." The commitment must never be taken entirely for granted. The follower of Christ must depend on him and on the bread he gives for support. What Christians, striving to be believers, do not suffer daily from the disparity between their profession of faith and the way they translate it into reality? But that fragility of faith also serves as a cry, a call which the Father hears most particularly every time he gifts us, in the eucharist, with the very life of his Son.