

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday OT Year B  
August 23, 2015

*Decide today whom you will serve.*

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2,15-18; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6: 60-69

While I do not frequent fast food restaurants very often, on occasion it is helpful to be able to grab a submarine sandwich or a quick bite on the run. However, I cannot help feeling as though when I step up to the counter, I am being asked to order almost immediately... not even having time to scour the menu above before one gets a sense that we are holding up the entire operation. The not so subtle message seems to be, “Decide now, or step aside.” Fair enough, for at least I know the rules.

The first reading this Sunday can barely disguise the frustration of Joshua, now the *de facto* leader of the Israelites. He had a difficult role in succeeding Moses, but here he is thoroughly fed up. He wants the people to decide, and to decide now, whom they will serve. There is no more time for waiting.

Joshua’s directive to ‘choose now’ was given because of what was at stake in his day. The Israelites had conquered for themselves the land of the Amorites, in what was quite likely a peaceful occupation. But some Jews chose to worship the Amorite deities. Why? Because they were convenient, there was a god for every need– gods of fertility, gods of the harvest, whatever seemed to suit their needs.

But this is not how the Lord Yahweh taught the Jews about worship. “I the Lord am your god, and you shall have no false gods.” It is not about finding a suitable god to meet our needs, but worshipping God in spirit and in truth, because He is worthy of our worship.

In the last Mass before the Cardinals went into the conclave to elect the successor to Pope John Paul II, the Dean of the College, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger preached the homily. He said this:

Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be “tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine”, seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.<sup>1</sup>

Wow! I'll never forget that homily. At the time, some opined that his homily struck too negative a tone, and might even hurt his chances at being elected. I suspect that this was the farthest thing from his mind and heart.

Today we have the fifth and final reading from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John's gospel. Next week we will go back to reading from Mark's gospel. We are enriched by the Scriptures these past weeks with their focus clearly on the Eucharist, and pray for the grace to allow ourselves continually to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ through our reception of the Eucharist as well as our worship of the Lord sacramentally present in the tabernacle.

Jesus knew full well those who would not believe, those who would betray him. Betrayal is a harsh word, it is uncompromising, and it pierces right to the core. But it needed to be written then, and it needs to be said today, because some desire to alter core beliefs. My responsibility as a Catholic priest is to teach the Truth in love to our people, but even before that, I first must live that truth.

Nor is this about judging another's soul, for I cannot do that either. We as Catholics ought to be motivated by a sincere conviction that God's law with respect to fundamental truths is crystal clear.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, homily at *Mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, 18 April 2005

With regard to the Eucharist, many left and stopped following Jesus, for the teaching on the Real Presence was difficult to accept. Of course it is- anyone can see it as a symbol, but the words of the Lord do not admit of ambiguity here. If Jesus was merely speaking symbolically about His Body and Blood, then why did he not immediately go after those who left, clarifying his comments?

Jesus asked a very important question- “Do you also want to leave?” This is a question totally relevant in our world today.

It is only the power of God that will transform us more and more into the likeness of His Son. When we conform to this age absent of the sure guidance of the Scripture and Tradition, we have fallen from the path, we will drift into spiritual and moral relativism and eventually into irrelevance. Joshua told the people to decide now whom they would serve. The Jews, we are told, decided to serve the Lord. It seems as though this question is more relevant than ever today. What is our answer?