

August 22, 2021

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Eph 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32

Jn 6:60-69

GROW: Have you ever felt nervous in standing up for something, or in taking a position on an issue? Even when the stakes are not particularly high, like a classroom debate over an author's meaning in her text or requesting that customer service fix a take-out order gone awry, it can be nerve-wracking for many of us to have this kind of engagement. It is especially difficult when we sense conflict. Why is that? Why do we care so much what others think of us? What about when the stakes are literally life or death? In today's first reading, Joshua is imploring the people to decide which god they will serve, and he boldly proclaims: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." In the Gospel, some of Jesus' disciples reject his teachings and drift back to "their former way of life." Jesus asks the Twelve whether they, too, "want to leave." Simon Peter responds with the rhetorical question, "Master, to whom [else] shall we go?" Like Joshua, he is bold in his own pronouncement: "You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Today's readings encourage and exhort us to go "all in" when it comes to discipleship. The implication is clear: it matters not what others think of us, or what attraction they might hold for us to acquiesce to them. God alone is the source of life, and the truth. He offers us a way – it's that simple. We simply must decide to serve him.

GO: At times this commitment, this life of discipleship, is more difficult than other times. Faith is a personal and communal relationship with our Triune God, and just like our human relationships it requires attentiveness, and "[living] in love as Christ loved us." Just as a spouse or roommate can annoy us – being messy, hearing the same joke over and over, and don't get me started on who gets to control the remote! – we may get upset with God because our expectations are not met. But God is God, not "who we think God ought to be." Therefore, today's readings are an encouragement to remain steadfast when things are difficult, with St. Paul comparing the love of Jesus for the Church (all of us!) with the mutual love between a husband and wife. No one said it would be easy. Just as a good marriage requires communication, give-and-take, and large doses of forgiveness, so does our relationship with the Lord require prayer, confession, repentance, and thanksgiving.

ACTION: Place Joshua's words on your refrigerator this week: "Decide today whom you will serve ... As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Brainstorm about how each member of your household can do that.