

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

A narrative reading. No one is compelled to follow God, who honors our free choice. Urge your assembly to make known their choice today.

Shechem = SHEK-uhm

Propose this question directly to your assembly.

Amorites = AM-her-itz

Quietly, but with great confidence. Pause before the response.

Quickly and with intensity.

Bump up your energy with this addition.

Raise your energy again. "And furthermore . . ."

Pause at the end of this line.

Slowly and emphatically.

LECTIONARY #122

READING I Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

A reading from the Book of Joshua

Joshua gathered together **all** the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their **elders**, their **leaders**, their **judges**, and their **officers**.

When they stood in ranks before **God**,

Joshua addressed all the people:

"If it does not **please** you to serve the **Lord**,

decide **today** whom you will serve,

the gods your **fathers** served beyond the River

or the gods of the **Amorites** in whose country you are now dwelling.

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

But the people answered,

"**Far** be it from us to **forsake** the **Lord**

for the service of **other** gods.

For it was the **LORD**, our God,

who brought us and our fathers up **out** of the land of Egypt, out of a state of **slavery**.

He performed those great **miracles** before our very eyes

and **protected** us along our **entire** journey

and among the **peoples** through whom we passed.

Therefore we **also** will serve the **LORD**, for **he** is our **God**."

READING I

The Book of Joshua is more than a long report of battles and conquests; it is a theological tract about the faithfulness of God who fulfills his promises. The concluding chapter, from which this passage is taken, includes a call to commitment—an invitation to the people, now taking possession of the Promised Land, to renew the covenant their ancestors made at Sinai. After the prologue that reviews what God has done for his people, Joshua measures their determination to

remain faithful. This author understands that God directs history and offers his loyalty to those who are committed to him.

READING II

In this passage Paul lays out a theological foundation for the Ephesians' domestic and community life. His opening instruction, "be subordinate to one another," is a shorthand way of telling them to grow together peacefully. Addressing husbands he writes "love your wives." He develops the motif of

the body of Christ, whose self-sacrifice is a model to imitate. Out of Christ's Death was born a Church holy and unblemished. In Christ believers are a single body, the growth of which depends on the well-being of every member.

With this analogy the Apostle encourages married Christians to a steady, mutual love. Basing his idea on the divine institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, Paul stamps the marriage bond with a new meaning: the intimate relationship between

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND
 Pay attention to the pace of your reading. Varying the pace gives listeners clues to the meaning of the text. The most common problem for proclaimers new to the ministry is going too fast to be understood.

A didactic reading that is difficult; read the commentary to understand the context. Work hard to ensure that Paul's love (and yours) for the community comes through.
 Ephesians = ee-FEE-shuhnz

Slowly and deliberately. This is a general instruction which applies to all relationships.

Emphasize all the parallels with Christ; everyone is to model themselves on the humility and servant-leadership of Christ.

With tenderness.

With energy and excitement over our splendor as Church.

A key point; slowly.

Christ and the Church. The wife is to serve her husband in the same spirit as the Church represents Christ's interests, and the husband is to care for his wife with the same devotion as Christ cares for the Church. The husband represents Christ, who gave his life for the redemption of the Church, and the wife represents the Church, who is submissive to Christ.

This is a difficult passage to hear today, concerned as we are for women's equal rights. The reading does not promote

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21 (9a)

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
 his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
 Let my soul glory in the LORD;
 the lowly will hear me and be glad.

The LORD has eyes for the just,
 and ears for their cry.
 The LORD confronts the evildoers,
 to destroy remembrance of them from
 the earth.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,
 and from all their distress he
 rescues them.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
 and those who are crushed in spirit
 he saves.

Many are the troubles of the just one,
 but out of them all the LORD delivers him;
 he watches over all his bones;
 not one of them shall be broken.

READING II Ephesians 5:21-32

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

[Brothers and sisters:]

Be **subordinate** to one another out of reverence for **Christ**.

Wives should be subordinate to their **husbands** as to the **LORD**.

For the **husband** is head of his wife

just as **Christ** is head of the **church**,
 he himself the **savior** of the body.

As the church is **subordinate** to Christ,

so **wives** should be subordinate to their husbands
 in **everything**.

[**Husbands**, love your wives,

even as Christ **loved** the church
 and **handed** himself over for her to **sanctify** her,
cleansing her by the bath of **water** with the **word**,
 that he might present to himself the church in **splendor**,
 without **spot** or **wrinkle** or **any** such thing,
 that she might be **holy** and without **blemish**.

So also husbands should **love** their wives as their own **bodies**.

He who loves his **wife** loves **himself**.]

a senseless, blind obedience or degrading submission of women to men, and it does not imply the abuse of power of one person over another. The phrase "wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything" does not require wives to accept degrading forms of subjection. The relationship modeled upon Christ's self-sacrificing love indicates the constant concern on the husband's part for her well-being.

This depiction of marriage illustrates the mutual reverence shared among the

members of Christ's body. Christ nourishes and cares for the Church, his body. We, too, nourish and encourage each other. Just as wife and husband are united in the holy bond of marriage, so Christ is one with the Church, and we are one body with each other in Christ.

GOSPEL The disciples had tasted the fine wine at the Cana wedding; they followed Jesus through unfriendly Samaria and witnessed the conversion of

Good news! We are all nourished by Christ!

Pause at the end of this line.

Slow on this final point.

A narrative reading. How does Jesus feel knowing that some will leave him based on what he has taught—sad, disappointed, rejected? Bring your choice to the proclamation.

In a low voice, to themselves; let their internal struggle come through.

“Don’t trust your reason alone; trust in the Spirit.”

Proclaim this line with Jesus’ emotion.

that difficult group; many persons had been healed by Jesus, and the crowd ate and were satisfied by the picnic of the five loaves. Now Jesus tests his disciples, especially Peter.

Jesus is all too familiar with indecisive, volatile human nature; he knows our projects and our best intentions; he also knows that we do what we do not want to do; that we eat what is not good for our health; we think and sin in ways that are not beneficial. Jesus knows that, as long as he fills our

For no one **hates** his own **flesh**
but rather **nourishes** and **cherishes** it,
even as **Christ** does the **church**,
because we are **members** of his body.
*For this reason a man shall **leave** his father and his mother
and be **joined** to his wife,
and the **two** shall become **one** flesh.*
This is a great **mystery**,
but I speak in reference to **Christ** and the **church**.

[Shorter: Ephesians 5:2a, 25–32 (see brackets). This shorter version adds 2a as the first line: “Live in love, as Christ loved us.”]

GOSPEL John 6:60–69

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Many of Jesus’ **disciples** who were **listening** said,
“This saying is **hard**; **who** can accept it?”
Since Jesus knew that his disciples were **murmuring** about this,
he said to them, “Does this **shock** you?
What if you were to see the Son of Man **ascending**
to where he was **before**?
It is the **spirit** that gives life,
while the **flesh** is of no avail.
The words I have spoken to you are **Spirit** and **life**.
But there are **some** of you who do not believe.”
Jesus **knew** from the beginning the ones who would not believe
and the one who would **betray** him.
And he said,
“For this reason I have told you that **no** one can come to me
unless it is **granted** him by my **Father**.”

bellies and baskets with his miracles, we will follow him. Such is the force of the gravity of our flesh. But, after filling bellies and reviving hopes, Jesus does not excuse us from the test; he talks to us about the Bread of life, and invites us to renounce any material benefit we might have planned for ourselves. He addresses our spiritual nature. He is the Bread come down from heaven; his flesh is real food and his blood real refreshment.

Many are rejecting Jesus’ teaching: “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” Jesus examines us to determine if we follow him for temporal or for eternal values. This test awakens our conscience, and perhaps painfully stirs us to reflect that we have been born not just for life in the present century, but for eternity.

Jesus does not wish to hold anybody by force of the miracles; we are free to follow or to abandon him. He invites us to discover our identity as disciples when he