

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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, 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, 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."

Shechem = SHEK-uhm
 This moment was so important that all the leaders were summoned.
 Three options are given to how they will answer Joshua's question: the Lord God, their past gods, or the gods of others. Joshua made his choice, now others must as well.
 Amorites = AM-eh-ritz

Deliver Joshua's choice with conviction.

The climactic points of their history are held up for admiration. God is personally involved in their lives. Notice how the people use personal and relational language in describing God's actions (us, we, our, and so on).

READING I

The word "crisis" can refer to a critical moment in land has been apportioned to each tribe and boundaries established among them. Cities of refuge have also been set up for those who have unintentionally killed others. Joshua has accomplished all that he has been asked to do. He is at the end of his life. Gathering the whole people of Israel again at Shechem—their primordial place of worship—he reminds them of their covenantal relationship with the Lord and, once more, he calls upon them to renew that covenant. This time, Joshua presents the matter as a crisis moment. They have

options. They can serve other gods like their ancestors did or like the previous inhabitants of the promised land had. But, after laying out their options, Joshua boldly makes a public decision on behalf of his household: they will serve the Lord. When faced with witnessing Joshua's public commitment to serve the Lord, the people find courage to remember the many things the Lord had done for them and accordingly echo Joshua's commitment. Similarly, sacraments mark and celebrate crisis moments in our journey with God. Baptism and confirmation celebrate

For meditation and context:

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.

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnZ

Try not to let your contemporary sensibilities
 react too strongly to the idea of subordination
 in the context of marriage. This reading
 is making a theological point about the
 intimate relationship between Christ and
 the Church and the way our human
 relationships image this.

Convey the tenderness of Christ's actions
 for the Church, his bride, in this passage.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

READING II Ephesians 5:21-32

[Brothers and sisters:]
 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.]

our initiation into the Church, which estab-
 lishes us in a new relationship with God.
 Marriage and ordination mark out our voca-
 tions. Anointing of the sick and reconcilia-
 tion sanctify times of weakness and frailty.
 The Eucharist, too, is a kind of routine crisis
 moment in which we are called upon to dis-
 cern God's real presence in the Eucharistic
 species and give our assent in the "amens"
 of the liturgy. We then respond with deci-
 sive actions; after receiving the Lord in the
 Eucharist, we are sent out from Mass to
 share him with the world.

READING II

In a protracted reflection
 on the deep, mysterious
 relationship between Christ and the
 Church, Ephesians appeals to the most fun-
 damental, intimate human relationship—
 marriage—to explain the bond between
 Christ and the Church. Using the model of
 household codes, which served as a para-
 digm for organizing ancient Greco-Roman
 households, Ephesians transforms the lan-
 guage of those codes to talk about the rela-
 tionship of Christ and the Church as a
 household built on mutual love and service.
 While contemporary readers might focus
 on elements of inequity in this passage of
 Ephesians, it aims to highlight the mutual
 service that is part and parcel of the most
 robust spousal relationships. Like a hus-
 band willing to die for his bride, Christ sanc-
 tifies the Church by offering himself. As a
 husband might wash his wife and clothe
 her in fine attire with the utmost affection,
 so Christ speaks his cleansing word to
 his bride, the Church, with the greatest
 affection. Moreover, Christ sanctifies the
 Church by wrapping her in the spotless and
 wrinkle-free "garment" of his loving word.

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." »

Since the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, we have heard from the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6. This protracted exchange between Jesus and his fellow Galilean Jews other should reign. caring for one's spouse. Such selfless care and mutual giving between spouses typically Christ's giving of himself for and to the Church. As such, the relationship between Christ and the Church provides the paradigm of the Christian household, wherein mutual subordination to the needs of the other and shelter. But Ephesians extends the claim. The care we provide in obtaining our own basic needs is to be applied to spouses. Love of one's spouse is to be considered tantamount to caring for one's own body. There ought not be a conceptual distinction between caring for oneself and Building on this imagery, Ephesians claims that everyone, fundamentally, cherishes and cares for their own flesh. Presumably all readers understand and live by this principle, which, in many respects, remains in force today. We see to our basic physical needs by obtaining food, clothing, and shelter. But Ephesians extends the claim. The care we provide in obtaining our own basic needs is to be applied to spouses. Love of one's spouse is to be considered tantamount to caring for one's own body. There ought not be a conceptual distinction between caring for oneself and

Christ humbled himself, became human, to be joined to us so that we could be joined to him. Christ's self-sacrificing love should be made manifest in marriage relationships. We can better embody this when we enter into the mystery of Christ's paschal love.

Jesus' claim that believers must eat his flesh and drink his blood scandalizes his followers. A shocking way to begin, responding to this claim of Jesus is at the heart of this reading. Jesus doesn't diminish his claim, he compounds it with more unbelievable details—his ascension.

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GOSPEL

As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "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."

Make this question personal. Look directly at the assembly and deliver, "Do you also want to leave?" Peter, taking the lead, speaks up. We too can respond to Jesus' question with a wholehearted "no." Pause slightly after each statement of faith that Peter makes.

arrives. Jesus' audience must decide if they are going to believe his teaching and act on it.

As before, they begin with a question in which they recognize (grumble about, really) the difficulty of his teaching: "who can accept it?" In this question a shift can be discerned. Last week the people's question focused on Jesus: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). Now they recognize that a decision about Jesus is at hand; it is a crisis moment. As before, Jesus responds to their question by amplifying

the matter. He points out that still more startling realities will transpire for those who follow him. For example, they will see him ascend to heaven. But he also points out that his message appeals to them because his words are Spirit and life. Moreover, they are already receiving God's grace because they are drawn to him. They only need to continue accepting the grace that drew them to him in the first place. But at this crisis moment, a division arises. Many disciples return to their former ways of life. His teaching about his flesh being true food and his blood being true drink is too hard for them. But when Jesus presses the Twelve about their loyalty to him, they echo God's chosen people's response to Joshua. With Simon Peter speaking on their behalf, they respond with faith to Jesus' entire Bread of Life Discourse: "You have the words of eternal life." Hearing this exchange, we face our participation in the Eucharist as a crisis moment as well, and are left to offer our own response. E.W.