

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY [B]

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Ephesians 5: 2a, 25-32; John 6:60-69

This is the sort of question that feels like the whole Church hangs in the balance. Jesus asks the remaining disciples, "Do you also want to leave?" (John 6:67).

What a question! It feels as though if they leave, it is all over, finished, caput, sayonara. Most assuredly the stakes are high as Jesus goes "all in" with his question.

Just a few short verses earlier we hear how many disciples found Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist too hard and they left (cf. John 6:66).

They left Jesus even after all that they had witnessed in such a short time beginning with the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus' crossing to the other side (and walking on water) and his long explanation about the true meaning of His Body and Blood as real food and drink necessary for eternal life.

And not merely as an individual, but speaking in the name of all the disciples who remain, Peter says: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life" (John 6:68).

Even as the crowds are leaving because Jesus' words about His Body being real food and His Blood being real drink are too hard to believe, the Church in the person and office of Peter gives the right answer to Jesus' dramatic question:

- Lord we accept these words;
- Lord, we accept these words of yours as the way to eternal life;
- Lord, we take you at your word that you mean what you say and say what you mean.

Friends, there is something about Jesus words regarding His Real Presence in the Eucharist that calls forth a decision at the core of our being, that calls forth a definitive "yes" or "no".

In the first reading today, Joshua asks this dramatic question to the people in his presence: "Who will you serve?" Then, Joshua dares to answer his own question by going in all in for the Lord God: "As for me and my family we will follow the Lord!" (cf. Joshua 24).

Joshua's moment is a sort of an either/or moment. A decision must be made: *either* we serve the Lord God *or* we do not.

The same is true regarding the Holy Eucharist. A decision must be made.

Mind you, there is wiggle-room regarding some aspects of our Faith. For example, there are different styles of spirituality.

- Some may prefer Franciscans, others Benedictines, still others Jesuits.
- Some prefer older music while others like hymns with a more contemporary sound.

Although wiggle-room is at play regarding some aspects in the life of the Church, there is no wiggle-room with the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus asks, “Do you also want to leave?”

The fact is that all the saints – wildly varied as they are – all the saints have loved the Eucharist through the centuries. Without exception, the saints have loved the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

A sign of schism and heresy is finding the teaching of Christ too hard and leaving His Holy Eucharistic Presence.

Now there are a few who wish to say that what we have at Mass is a symbolic representation of the heavenly body of Jesus. On first hearing this might even sound logical: Jesus ascended, His resurrected Body is in heaven and what we have at Mass is a symbol.

However, Jesus says otherwise as does His Church who unhesitatingly has taught since its beginning that the Mass is not a symbolic representation. By the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become no less than Christ’s Body and Blood (cf. *Catechism* 1333).

We believe that Jesus meant what He said and said what He meant.

As we heard in the Gospel last week, when given the chance to offer a symbolic interpretation Jesus turns up the intensity so this very point is not misunderstood:

Unless you eat my Body and drink my Blood you will have no life within you (cf. John 6:53-58).

The Eucharist is a hard teaching. Always had been and always will be.

And a decision must be made: do you also want to leave?

To whom shall we go? If we throw in the towel because we find it just too hard and leave, *really* to whom shall we go?

Lord, you and you alone have the words of eternal life.