

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time: Lord, you have the words of eternal life (B)

Joshua 24:1-2a,15-17,18b; Psalm 34:2-3,16-17,18-19,20-21; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6:60-69

Dear family and friends of the co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

How is your faith today? How do you nurture it at this time of pandemic?

We can answer these questions by saying my faith is about Jesus, my Lord, and Savior, and the Holy Eucharist is my strength.

Today we heard Joshua and Peter provided remarkable declarations of faith:

- "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).
- "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" (John 6:68).

When Joshua declared to only worship their God, he did this as a precaution because the place they now occupied worship many gods, and it could potentially influence Israel into the practice of idolatry. He firmly stood against the worship of many gods and pledged to worship only the Lord, the God of their fathers. And it will start with his family. He said, "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Undoubtedly, this implies that witness to the faith begins in the family.

Speaking about family, St. Paul teaches that every human relationship should go beyond a "quid pro quo" relationship, not only turning a favor for a favor, or "you scratch my back and I scratch yours." But it should mirror the loving ways of God to us. He said, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). How did Christ love the Church? He serves her as a good shepherd to his flock. He washes her feet like a slave to a master and gives his life by dying on the cross. St. Paul admonishes husbands to be servants to their wives and give their lives totally and unconditionally to them. I want to think that this advice is for all the members of the household of God. Witness to the faith begins in the family.

I often hear from faithful Catholic parents complaining that their children are no longer coming to Church. They were brought up according to the Catholic faith, but it seems that the world snatches them out from the practice of the faith. I can only surmise that maybe they don't understand or refuse to understand that the Eucharist is the be-all and in all of Christian life. Perhaps the practice of faith of their parents doesn't fit their wants; maybe the Catholic Tradition is no longer significant to them anymore, or the ritual in the Holy Mass has no meaning for them, or they may find a contradiction between what we believe and what we do. It may be that we are not doing well in our Catechesis on the Holy Eucharist. Honestly, I may not have convincing reasons, but I can certainly say that they have abandoned the incredible gift of Jesus of himself as flesh to eat and blood to drink for eternal life. But if we witness faith in our families, we must always be gentle yet persistent in our reminders and witness. And there is no better way but to pray for them in humility to the Blessed Virgin Mary -- she, the tabernacle of the food of eternal life, hears the humble prayer and will intercede our prayers.

Remember, we are not the only ones facing this kind of challenge. Our Lord Jesus, too. In the gospel reading this Sunday, which is the conclusion of the Bread of Life discourse, we see the unfortunate result of his teachings. Many people were turning away from him. Despite the miracle of the multiplication of bread, the healing of the sick, proclamation of the good news, these did not hold the people to stay. It is the only instance in the Gospels where followers of Jesus abandon him in such large numbers. But he didn't make an effort to soften his words or clear up potential misunderstandings of his teachings. But he makes it very clear that no one can come to him unless the Father grants it. It is faith. Meaning the Bread of Life that he offered is to be accepted by faith.

Notice, in the Church liturgical year Cycle B, we spend several Sundays on chapter 6 of the Gospel of John about the Bread of Life which we interpret in the context of the Holy Eucharist. Discernibly, we dwell more on this particular chapter to emphasize among the faithful the seriousness of our Lord Jesus's offer and the serious consequence of ignoring his offer and his words. Peter's response to Jesus' question, "do you also want to leave?" is a huge acclamation of faith, "Master, to whom we shall go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Peter and the other apostles decided to stay with the Lord not because his teachings were clear. They remained with Jesus because they trusted his words -- that he is not just one of the sources of life, but he is the life; that he is not just one of the many ways, he is the way; and that he doesn't just speak the truth, he is the truth.

To humbly accept in faith the offer of our Lord Jesus as the Bread of Life and living his words are the ways to nurturing the family's faith to thrive under any circumstances in life. Just as the Holy Eucharist builds the Church, Jesus' words give life and prepares for eternal life; therefore, it certainly builds a family. Let us continue to witness to our families the incredible gift of God Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

Let us pray the grace of faith, better still, the renewal of faith as we make our acclamation: "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." And "Lord, 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."

They are profound acclamations that we can use as our own. Amid the trials of life, use them as your mantra in prayer. When confronted with unbelief, make them your compass or GPS. When challenged to keep your family together, use them as your moor or anchor.

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor