

21<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B  
THE ETERNAL CHOICE

*“What about you, do you want to go away too?’ ... ‘Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that You are the Holy One of God’” (Jn 6: 67, 68)*

**The Concluding Part:** Last week, we celebrated the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, we missed out on the bit of the discourse of Jesus on the Bread of Life, where Jesus unapologetically stressed the fact that He is: “the Living Bread come down from heaven.” He emphasised: “I tell you most solemnly: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you will not have life in you” (Jn. 6: 53). The pericope we have before us today contains the reaction of the people to this, Jesus big question and the timeless response of Peter. Today’s pericope concludes our four-week reflection on the Eucharist: Jesus, the Bread of Life.

**Life's A Choice:** In life, the choices we make define us and determine our future, including the life hereafter. Choice inherently implies both acceptance and negation, for by choosing, we give an accent to a particular option while negating all others. The First Reading (Jos. 24: 1-2, 15-18) presents this fact of choice today. Joshua calls the elders and judges of Israel at Shechem, where God first appeared to their father Abraham promising to make his descendants a great nation in a new land (Gen. 12: 1-9) and says to them: “If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living.” This was necessary because faithfulness to The One God was commanded by The Decalogue. “You shall have no other gods but Me” (Ex. 20: 3). The God of Israel, Who is our God is a “jealous God.” In an earlier instance, Moses had presented them with similar options (Deut. 30: 19): “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life that you and your descendants may live.” Jesus confirms these lines of demand when He teaches: “You cannot serve two masters” (Matt. 6: 24). In the Book of Revelation, the Church in Laodicea is condemned by God because they are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold (Rev. 3: 15-16). Joshua has a clear understanding of his choice and states it without mincing words: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” We shall soon encounter Peter declare his choice of Jesus over all else in the gospel. This is what is presented to us as well. Where do we stand? What or Who is our choice? On whose side are we? Remember, our choices define us and determine our future and our destination in the hereafter.

**We Have No Intention of Deserting:** I am particularly touched by the wordings of the response of the children of Israel to the question of Joshua. I can easily relate with this: “We have no intention of deserting the Lord our God ... We too will serve the Lord, for He is our God.” History has shown that the Israelites went against their words time and time again. God punished them, they repented and failed again, and the circle continued in repeated chains. As Christians, we desire to serve the Lord, to choose Him over all others. Like the children of Israel, we have “no intention of deserting our God.” But ... there is a

big but! For experience proves that there are times we are forced by fear, confused by doubts, and weakened by the passion to desert the Lord. Many times, the spirit is willing but the body is weak; most times, we have good intentions, but we lack the will to carry them out; often we know what to do, but we lack the courage to do it. Like St. Paul, we find ourselves doing the bad things we would not like to do (Rom. 7: 15). Our life is both a challenge to live the good life consistently and a struggle against our desires the causes us to fall. We need to be spiritually alert so that we do not find ourselves doing the things we do not intend to do.

***An Intolerable Language or The Most Acceptable Truth:*** The teaching of Jesus about Himself as the Bread come down from heaven which every man must eat to have life did not go down well with His listeners. For them, “This is intolerable language.” Here they were complaining and murmuring, like their ancestors in the desert. Nothing seals a man’s heart from truth the way complaints does. Acceptance of the truth requires humility and openness to something new. The Jews currently were impervious to the teaching of Jesus. One would have expected Jesus to soften or water down His teaching. But instead, Jesus insisted and challenges them even further: “Does this upset you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?” Here referring to His Ascension that would be the final affirmation of His divinity, He draws His listeners to a deeper fact about Himself. Notice the action of Jesus here: He insists on the truth instead of watering it down to make His teaching popular and to be accepted by the crowd. In a world that emphasises “political correctness” over and above faithfulness to the truth, God calls us to make the hard choice of speaking the truth with love.

***The Eternal Choice:*** The crowd begins to disperse and many of His disciples stopped going with Him. Instead of calling them back for further explanations or negotiations, Jesus turns to the Twelve, the members of the inner circle, and asks: “What about you, do you want to go away too?” Peter responds with his famous confession of faith in Jesus: “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that You are the Holy One of God.” By this, Peter declared both his choice and determination to go with Jesus because there was nothing else after Jesus. He is the incomparable choice. The use of the “we” indicates the prime place of Peter among the Twelve, speaking on behalf of the others. By addressing Jesus as “The Holy One of God”, Peter professes Jesus’ divinity, a fact that the crowd found difficult to accept. In the end, we realise that Christianity is a journey of personal choice. Faith needs no majority accent.

***My dear friends,*** having listened to Jesus’ teaching on the Eucharist these past Sundays, Jesus challenges us today as well: in a world of so much indifference to God, Jesus asks us: “What about you, do you want to go away too?” At a time when religion appears to be the guilty of the world’s most heinous violence, Jesus invites us to stand up, speak for and live out the truth of the gospel. We must make a choice. We must take a stand. We must tell the world whose side we are on. His grace is sufficient for us.