

## 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

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

*Joshua was the successor of Moses. He led the Israelites into the Promised Land and conquered the land of Canaan.<sup>2</sup> Just before he died, Joshua parceled out the Promised Land among the twelve tribes and fearing that they would soon stray from the Lord, he held a spectacular covenant renewal ceremony at a central location about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. Shechem, had a natural amphitheater flanked by two small mountains. Half the people stood on Mount Gerizim shouting the blessings for keeping the covenant, alternating with the other half who stood on Mount Ebal shouting the curses for breaking the covenant.<sup>1</sup>*

**1**Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. The Israelites were a group of tribes without any political unity except that of common tribal feeling and the worship of Yahweh. Joshua's summons included all those who had positions of leadership or influence over the people. **When they stood in ranks before God,** Their ranks during war are now carried over into their liturgy for this gathering is a ceremony and not just a speech.

**2**Joshua addressed all the people: Joshua gives a stirring speech, exhorting the nation to choose whom it would serve: the pagan gods or Yahweh.<sup>1</sup>

**15**"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 These were related to the Canaanites who were descendents of the incestuous relationship of Ham and his mother. They practiced a number of sexual perversions including maternal and other forms of incest as part of their ritual worship.<sup>3</sup> The drinking and whoring of Canaanite worship was attractive so some of the Israelites were intermarrying and placating Canaan's fertility gods WHILE STILL WORSHIPING YAHWEH.<sup>1</sup> **in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** This is the most important passage in the whole book. Joshua calls upon all Israel to make THE great choice, the single greatest choice every individual and society must make in his, her, or their life, because this choice determines the meaning and purpose and point of life itself, and even determines life or death for eternity.<sup>5</sup> This reading is chosen to connect with the gospel account of the choice Jesus gives his followers of either staying with him or walking away from him. The primary time that we recommit our choice is at Easter when we renew our baptismal promises.<sup>4</sup>

**16**But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods. The people swore to remain faithful to Yahweh and agreed that if they rebelled they deserved the curses.<sup>1</sup> The phrase "other gods" might sound foreign to us, but think about the many things that are prized so highly by some believers that they compete with their dedication to the faith. In that way, the goals of the culture of acquisition and narcissism in which we live are like the "other gods" in the text from Joshua.<sup>16</sup>

**17**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.

**18b**Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God." Yahweh had given Moses explicit instructions for the people: "When you go across the Jordan into the land of Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you; destroy all their stone figures and molten images, and demolish all their high places. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those whom you allow to remain will become as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and

they will harass you in the country where you live and I will treat you as I had intended to treat them.” Of course, they did not drive out ALL the inhabitants and they did not destroy ALL the devoted things. They began to intermarry with Canaanites who led them to worship their false idols. Even after the wonderful covenant renewal ceremony that reminded the people of all that God had done for them, Joshua knew that their hearts were still divided and their promise was easier said than done.<sup>3</sup>

### **Ephesians 5:21-32**

*The key to this reading is that real spiritual leadership is found in service. Being submissive does not mean becoming a doormat for Jesus Christ submitted his will to the Father.<sup>9</sup>*

#### **Brothers and sisters:**

**21Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.** St. Paul calls for mutual submission within the network of relationships that follow: husbands and wives, (22-25) parents and children, (6:1-4) slaves and masters (6:5-9). The submission he recommends in these various circumstances is reciprocal although not strictly identical, for the commands given to husbands, fathers, and masters are different from those given to wives, children, and slaves.<sup>6</sup> St. Paul gives us a general principle, which should govern relationships among members of the Church: they should submit to one another because Christ is their true judge and he has lordship over all.<sup>7</sup> Christ’s self-sacrificing love for others is now the model for home life.<sup>8</sup>

**22Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.** The basis of the supernatural dignity of Christian marriage lies in the fact that it is an extension of the union between Christ and his Church. Jesus describes himself as the bridegroom and the relationship between Christ and the Church appears in the New Testament in terms of husband-wife. A Christian wife, by the way she relates to her husband, should reflect the Church itself, in its obedience to Christ. The husband, for his part, is asked to be similarly submissive to his wife, for he is a reflection of Jesus Christ, who gave himself up even to death out of love for the Church.<sup>7</sup>

**23For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body.**

**24As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.** Pope Pius XI taught that the submission of the wife neither ignores nor suppresses the liberty to which her dignity as a human person and her noble functions as wife, mother, and companion give her the full right. It does not oblige her to yield indiscriminately to all the desires of her husband, which may be unreasonable or incompatible with her wifely dignity. But it does forbid the abuse of freedom that would neglect the welfare of the family. If the husband is the head of the domestic body, then the wife is its heart; and as the first holds the primacy of authority, so the second can and ought to claim the primacy of love.<sup>7</sup>

**25Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her** Christ loved the Church by teaching and honoring her, sacrificing, suffering and being humiliated for her, as well as providing for and dying for her. A husband is to do for his bride exactly what Christ did for his bride. A husband may not be called to die physically for his wife, but he is called to die to himself. He is called to die to his needs and tend to her needs first.<sup>9</sup> The husband’s mission is to build up his marriage and family, not to dominate or demean them for selfish ends. His model is Christ, whose love was put into action by sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

26to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, Paul sets a high standard for a husband's love for his wife because the model is nothing less than Christ's love for the Church.<sup>7</sup> This image is derived from the ceremonial bath of the bride before marriage. The only other place in the NT where the word "loutron" (bath, washing) occurs is in Titus 3:5 where it refers to baptism. Christ sanctifies and purifies through Baptism those who are going to become members of his Church. The phrase "with the word" may allude to either the baptismal formula or the confession of faith.<sup>8</sup> Paul's comments recall the symbolic imagery of Ezek 16:8-14, where Yahweh entered a covenant of marriage with Jerusalem after bathing her in water and clothing her with beautiful garments. In the new economy, Christ weds the Church to himself after cleansing her in Baptism and clothing her with the fine linen of righteous deeds.<sup>6</sup>

27that he might present to himself the church in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, Real love is the great cleanser and purifier of all life. that she might be holy and without blemish. Vatican II teaches that the Church is held to be unfailingly holy. Christ loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her. Therefore all in the Church, whether they belong to the hierarchy or are cared for by it, are called to holiness. In addition, the vocation of marriage is a true way of holiness and not just a social institution nor a mere remedy for human weakness. It is a *genuine supernatural calling*.<sup>7</sup> According to Jewish custom, there was a lapse of time between the contract or espousal and the presentation of the bride to her husband. This could parallel the time interval between the contract at baptism and the final presentation of the bride (the Church) to Christ at the Second Coming.<sup>8</sup>

28So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. This is necessary if the husband and wife are to be two in one flesh. Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers says that "A man who thinks he is the boss, is lost!" He who loves his wife loves himself.

29For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church,

30because we are members of his body.

31"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." The Church has taught and continues to teach that the marriage of a baptized man and woman is a *permanent* contract and one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant.<sup>7</sup>

32This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. Verse 31, which is a quote from Genesis, was God's long-hidden secret which we now understand to have reference to "Christ and the church."<sup>8</sup>

## John 6:60-69

*This is a continuance of last week's Gospel where Jesus said: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."*

60Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" The people would accept him as a meek, gentle reformer, but when it came to saying that he would give his very life, more intimately than a mother gives life to a child at her breast, that was too much.<sup>12</sup>

**61** Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, “Does this shock you?”

**62** **What if you were to see the Son of Man** The basis for this title is a vision in the Book of Daniel in which the “Son of man” is enthroned in heaven, given authority over all nations, and his royal appointment signals the dramatic defeat of God’s enemies. Jesus uses the title when he is teaching about his own kingship and about the authority given him to triumph over evil.<sup>11</sup> **ascending to where he was before?**

**63** **It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail.** Here Jesus is not speaking of his own flesh, which does in fact give life to the world. This is a contrast between the spirit’s ability to enlighten our minds and human reason’s inability to comprehend revealed truths apart from faith.<sup>10</sup> **The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.**

**64** **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.** This break caused him a sorrow so great that a thousand years before, it had been prophesied as one of those human rents which would torture his soul: the loss of Judas. Many wonder why Judas broke with Our Lord; they think it was only at the end of Our Lord’s life, and that it was only love of money that forced the break. This Gospel tells us the astounding story that Judas broke with Our Divine Lord the day He announced the giving of his Flesh for the life of the world. In the midst of this long story of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Gospel tells us that Our Lord knew who it was that would betray him. Showing Judas that he knew, he said: “One of you is a devil.” (John 6:71) At this promise of the Heavenly Bread, Judas cracked; and at the giving of the Eucharist on the night of the Last Supper, Judas split wide open and betrayed.<sup>12</sup>

**65** **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.”**

**66** **As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.** This is the only instance in the Gospels where followers of Jesus abandon him in such large numbers. Even so, Jesus still makes no effort to soften his words or clear up potential misunderstandings about his Eucharistic teaching.<sup>10</sup> It can only be that they understood it correctly and could not swallow it. And Jesus permitted them to leave. His silence is quite loud.<sup>12</sup> This all takes place on the very day after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes so that they fed the 5,000 when the crowds acknowledged him as the great prophet and were ready to carry him off and make him their king!<sup>13</sup> Fulton Sheen catches the spirit of the abandonment by saying that Calvary would be the physical Crucifixion but this was the social Crucifixion.<sup>12</sup> It is important to understand that to celebrate the Passover, you wouldn’t eat a lamb-shaped cracker or a lamb-shaped cookie as a sign of the sacrificial lamb. You really had to eat the lamb to share in the communion with God that was forged by the sacrifice. Similarly, in the new Passover of the Eucharist, we do not partake in a mere symbol of Jesus, but really partake in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world — Jesus, really present in the Eucharist.<sup>13</sup>

**67** **Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?”** Our Lord is now practically alone. There would be only 120 awaiting his Spirit on Pentecost. He had seen the masses abandon him, the elite walk away and Judas prepare to betray him.<sup>12</sup>

**68** **Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.** This is the first time that we have Peter acting as spokesman for the Twelve, answering a question addressed to them all.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” This title for Jesus is a confession of faith by Peter who believes the words of Christ from the heart, even though his head does not yet understand the mysteries revealed in the discourse.

*For 2000 years the Catholic Church—from the voices of the early Christians to the recent teachings of Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church—has consistently taught Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist and the centrality of the Eucharist in the Christian life.<sup>15</sup>*

*Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) “The Story of Stories” by Karen Lee Thorp, (2) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (3) “A Father Who Keeps His Promises,” by Scott Hahn, (4) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) “You Can Understand The Bible” by Peter Kreeft, (6) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (8) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (9) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (10) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) “Life of Christ” by Fulton J. Sheen, (13) “Catholic For A Reason” Chapter VIII, “The Heart of the Home: Jesus in the Eucharist” by Edward P. Sri, (14) “To Know Christ Jesus” by Frank Sheed, (15) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn, and (16) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2006” by Martin Connell.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*