

Homily. 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 24/25 August 2024.

God chose a people so that this people would be free to make a choice. Nearing the end of his life Joshua gathered the chosen people together before God. They had entered the land under his command when after the death of Moses he took over their leadership. On this decisive day he put before them the truth that God had chosen them, proved by all God had done to liberate them. Now, they needed to choose who they would serve and follow; the old pagan gods or the Living Lord who freed them and led them to this new land. Joshua had no hesitation about his choice.

In this assembly the people said that they, too, would serve and obey the way of the Lord who had chosen, guided, protected them. Sadly, as we've been shown us time and time again, the words of the people weren't matched by their deeds. In this sense the story of Israel to this day is a parable for and of humanity, wherein there is a cleft between what we say and what we do; between what we profess and what we practice.

The teaching on the Bread of Life we've been hearing over these past five weeks also ends with a gathering and a choice. Remember, Jesus started with over 5,000 people as well as his disciples. Having heard his teaching most had chosen to leave. They'd come for the free food and full bellies, not for the message and meaning of the sign he gave. John's gospel text says that now only his disciples remained, the crowd and the Jewish leaders having all walked away. Hearing the end of Jesus teaching John tells us that many of these left too and stopped going forwards with him, leaving only the Twelve, the core group.

Now Jesus asked them to make their choice; to stick with him or to vanish into the mist. They'd been chosen but what would they choose? The way of life he was proposing or the comfortable way of selfishness that leads to death? The old manna of the desert that all who ate of it died, or the new way of the Lord gifting the living bread that shares with us the very life of God? Peter, spokesman that he was, proclaimed that they would walk with Jesus, the Holy One who had the message of eternal life.

We are the descendants of this choice, the people of the new covenant, the new family and people God has chosen, a choice of us that God renews in every place and age until the end of time. What choice, then, will we make today? Will we dare to be different, matching our intentions and words with our deeds and actions? Will we, with God's gracious help, not only take the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation into ourselves but also allow these sacred gifts to change us, as they were changed themselves in our Eucharist, so that all this sacrament means and celebrates truly becomes flesh in us for the life of the world?

The Ordination Rite of a new Priest, when presented with the Book of the Gospels, says words that are relevant to each of us; Will we believe what we read, preach what we believe and practice what we preach? Chosen by God we are and so with abundant loving respect for our freedom and will God gives it to us to exercise our choice; to be for Christ's way or not? For God's loving way is always built up on our free choices such as these.