

Father Francis Chiawa's Homily  
August 25 & 26, 2018  
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

### **God or Nothing**

Dear brothers and sisters, last week we derived our inspiration from the words that the Lord spoke when he said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53). We dwelled upon the theme of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. This Sunday, I invite you to reflect with me upon the subject of God or nothing. Our motivation for this topic comes from the words the Lord spoke through St Peter, our first pope: "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 6:68-69). The Psalm written from a much earlier time states, "What else have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth. My body and my heart faint for joy; God is my possession forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). Some translations are even more poetic: "Though my flesh and my heart fail, God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever" (Psalm 73: 26).

Peter, on behalf of the rest of the Apostles, asked our Lord, "Master to whom shall we go?" He was responding to the Lord who had said to him, "Do you also want to leave?" (John 6:67). This conversation happened in the aftermath of the Lord's insistence that He is the living bread that came down from heaven and that whoever eats this bread will live forever for the bread that he gives is his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). He said, "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:55). The rest of the people considered this statement to contain intolerable language and they deserted the Lord but Peter and the other Apostles, including Judas, stood with the Lord. Together, with Peter, the Apostles chose God. They said it is either God or nothing. And so, I ask you... what else is there but God?

The question Joshua asked the people of God at the crossroad of their journey to freedom is the same question the Lord asked the Apostles in Capernaum. This question confronts us every second of our life. Who do we choose? In the case of the people of God of Joshua's generation, with one accord, they said that they would serve the Lord but when Joshua and the people of his generation who saw the mighty work of the Lord had died, things changed. The later generation did not follow the good example of their ancestors. The word of God tells us what happened:

A later generation arose that did not know the LORD or the work he had done for Israel, the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They served the Baals, and abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the one who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other gods, the gods of the peoples around them, and bowed down to them, and provoked the LORD (Joshua 2:10-12).

What were the consequence of this action? They unblessed themselves. The word of God states their situation clearly:

Because they had abandoned the LORD and served Baal and the Astartes, the anger of the LORD flared up against Israel, and he delivered them into the power of plunderers who

despoiled them. He sold them into the power of the enemies around them, and they were no longer able to withstand their enemies” (Joshua 2:13-14).

When we choose God, who chose us first, the opposite happens to us. We are blessed. The Word of God declares:

He is happy who is helped by Jacob’s God, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who alone made heaven and earth, the seas and all they contain. It is he who keeps faith forever, who is just to those who are oppressed. It is he who gives bread to the hungry, the Lord, who sets prisoners free, the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up those who are bowed down, the Lord, who protects the stranger and upholds the widow and orphan (Psalm 146:5-9).

Think of the story of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Esau was a materialist. He sold his birthright for a porridge of food. Immediate gratification was more important to him than the will of God for his life. Jacob on the other hand chose God’s ways for himself and his name was immortalized. He became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel and through his progeny, Christ the Lord was born. All of this befell Jacob because he chose God who is the beauty, the good and true without end.

What is the one way in our time that we can demonstrate that we have chosen God? It is in the way we uphold and honor family and marriage as a covenant between a man and a wife, which mirrors the covenant between God and man. However, if divorce has happened, do not weep over spilled milk; get an annulment. If you fall in love again, get married in the Church and stay with your spouse in good times and bad, and in sickness and health. The second reading today tells us:

Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife, just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body (Ephesians 5:22-23).

And on the other hand, ...

Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her (Ephesians 5:25-26).

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 in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15).

Brothers and sisters, where do I stand? What is my choice? When we chose anything other than God, we are like Esau, who traded away his birthright.

May I conclude with the Hymn, “O God, Our Help in Ages Past,” based on Psalm 90 and composed by Isaac Watts (1674-1748):

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be now our guard while troubles last,  
And our eternal home.

Beneath the shadow of Your throne  
Your saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is your arm alone,  
And our defense is sure.