

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, AUGUST
22, 2021

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD, FOR HE IS OUR GOD

Dear brothers and sisters,

Does life not constantly confront us with choices between God and what is not of God, between the good and the evil, between serving God and serving ourselves? Do we not face daily the challenge of choosing what is right, holy, noble and difficult versus what is wrong, sinful, ignoble and easy? The ancient peoples of God during the time of Joshua and during the time of early Christians faced similar challenges. How did they handle these? What can we learn from them about serving the Lord? In the first reading and the gospel we hear inspiring choices for God. We shall serve the Lord, for is our God. "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).

The response, "We shall serve the Lord, for he is our God" came from all the twelve tribes, together with their elders, leaders, judges, and officers assembled by Joshua in a place called Shechem, the same spot where God first appeared to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-9).

At that time, they had entered and settled in the Promised Land. Joshua and Jesus mean the same thing - God saves. Joshua knew that their security, happiness, peace and prosperity depended on whether they had their priorities

right. He narrated to them the history of their walk with God and then asked them: "If it is displeasing to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). On their part the people unanimously answered,

"Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods. For it was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our ancestors up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He performed those great signs before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among all the peoples through whom we passed. At our approach the LORD drove out all the peoples, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God"(Joshua 24:16-18).

Joshua asked this question to remind them that the meaning of life is in God. This was to save them from falling into their past sins of frequent disloyalties and infidelities. "God has been faithful to the promise of the land. If Israel relies totally on the Lord for victory; if Israel is united as a people; if the law of herem is kept and no one grows rich from victory in war-then and only then will Israel possess the land." The possession of the land was a foreshadow of the heavenly homeland. Things worked well for them when they stayed faithful to their profession of faith in God. The Book of Judges gave a vivid account of this. But Israel had been unfaithful to God. They brought upon themselves the

calamities of exile and deportation of the northern tribes in 721/722 BC and of the Southern tribes of Judah in 587 BC. What can we learn from this? Do not bracket or jettison God in your life. It is all bleak, hopelessness and loss when we live as if God does not exist.

In the gospel, our Lord insisted that he was truly the bread of life that comes down from heaven. Meaning that the Eucharist was his true body, blood and soul and divinity. Some people found the teaching intolerable and they called it quits. In order to drive the point home that he meant what he said, Jesus asked the apostles if they would also go away like the rest? On behalf of the other apostles, Peter answered, "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). This response from the apostles is the echo of the profession of faith Israel made at Shechem - "We shall serve the Lord, for is our God" (Joshua 24:24). The apostles held firm to this faith till death. After one thousand six hundred years this faith was held among the Christians until Martin Luther, Calvin and their successors introduced the rift that led some people away from their faith in the real presence of Christ today.

Where are we today? Are we following the good examples of the apostles and the faithful disciples down through the ages? Are we serving the Lord or serving ourselves? The second reading provides how we can serve the Lord in the family setting. "Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:25). Let

God be the reference point on how we treat one another. May ours not be one of domination, getting ahead and putting others down or worshiping money status and things.

CONCLUSION

Our daily life experiences is that sometimes we make resolutions to do what is right, avoid sins and bad habits but we more often fail. What is our hope in the face of this existential quagmire? It is the Lord. He alone can give us the strength to rise when we have fallen. Following the lead of St Augustine, we pray:

Heal and open my eyes, that I may behold the signs of thy command. Drive delusion from me, that I may recognize Thee. O Lord, most merciful Father receive, I pray, Thy fugitive; enough already, surely, have I been punished, long enough have I served Thine enemies, whom Thou hast under Thy feet, long enough has error had its way with me. To Thee I feel I must return: I knock; may Thy door be opened to me; teach me the way to Thee.