

Homily for August 27, 2006
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

By Father Charles Bowes

Joshua 24: 1-2, 15-17, 18
Psalm 34: 2-3, 16-21
Ephesians 5: 21-32
John 6: 60-69

The Lord calls us to believe, not just in a teaching, but to believe in him.

I recall, as a young fellow studying to become a priest, that I had a lot of difficulty with this teaching on the Eucharist in Saint John's Gospel.

I liked most of what Jesus taught and what the Church presented, but the Eucharist – that was way out there. I wanted to be eclectic, to pick and choose what my Catholicism would be – a little of this, a lot of that – some moral principles here, some social justice there – that would be my Catholicism. “You can't make Catholicism in your image,” my professor said.

“At some point, you've got to let go and let God,” he said. Well, what we hear in today's gospel passage are the verdicts of Jesus' followers about the claims he had made in the gospel passages we have heard the past three Sundays. Those who rejected Jesus were people whose starting and ending points for having faith in him were the concepts he taught or the actions he performed. They, in effect, were saying: “I accept that God forgives; that we are the light of the world, that to be forgiven we must forgive. But I just cannot accept that this man is the living Bread, that ‘he is come down from heaven,’ that we must eat his body and drink his blood. No way; nope, that's a definite no, no. I can't accept that,” they're saying.

What is different for those who chose to follow Jesus is that they believed in him. They didn't view

faith as simply belief in a set of propositions, but rather they had faith in a person! Note that Peter does not say to Jesus, “We are staying because what you say makes sense.”

Rather, Peter and company believe that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Those who stay, those who don't leave, also believe in Jesus as the Holy One of God, and therefore they will believe in what he teaches, even if it is difficult to accept, even if they don't have a firm grasp on the meaning of what he teaches.

This does not mean that those who continued to follow the Lord did not ask questions or wonder about what he said. They indeed asked questions. When Jesus declared that marriage was indissoluble, they were shocked. When Jesus declared that the rich will have a very difficult time entering the Kingdom of God, they replied by asking, “Then who can be saved?” There are numerous times when his followers just didn't get the point! Yet, ultimately, they put their trust in Christ, and because of that, they accepted what he taught, realizing that the problem may not be in what he taught, but how they understood it.

My friends, this situation is not unique to those who heard the physical voice of Jesus almost 2,000 years ago. It is a situation that manifests itself in our own day, in our own lives. Now because we are all here at Mass this morning is an indication that we have not

walked away from Jesus because of his teaching. But it may be that we, too, are prone to accept tenets of faith: that Jesus is human and divine, that Jesus is present in the Eucharist, that Jesus has saved us. Yet, we may not be putting our faith in Jesus.

To put faith in Jesus means that we do not simply believe in a list of propositions or simply follow a set of laws, whether the Ten Commandments, the Greatest Commandment or the laws of the Church.

To put our faith in Jesus means that we trust him more than anyone or anything else. That's what Peter and the faithful remnant did: They trusted in Jesus and thus accepted what he taught. The test of how much faith we have in Jesus is how much we gamble our lives on Jesus. Do we trust Jesus enough to be detached from our possessions and use them for the good of others? Do we trust Jesus enough to not cheat in school or in business, to be honest even when it costs us? Do we trust in Jesus enough to seek to love our enemy and pray for our persecutors? Do we trust Jesus enough to believe that we are forgiven and live with that peace of mind?

To believe in Jesus is not something that we either do or don't do. It's something we grow into by trying over and over again to trust and to make the leaps of faith that span the chasms of distrust in God and trust in the illusions of this world. This Eucharist we celebrate. The word of God we hear, the sacrifice we offer, the food and drink we receive are given to us so that we may continue to grow in trust in the Lord.

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