

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

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

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When they stood in ranks before God, Joshua addressed all the people: "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."

But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods. 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. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The LORD has eyes for the just,
and ears for their cry.
The LORD confronts the evildoers,
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,
and from all their distress he rescues them.
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Many are the troubles of the just one,
but out of them all the LORD delivers him;
he watches over all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading 2

Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32

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.

As the church is subordinate to Christ,

so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ loved the church

and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,

cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,

that he might present to himself the church in splendor,

without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,

that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh

but rather nourishes and cherishes it,

even as Christ does the church,

because we are members of his body.

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.

This is a great mystery,

but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

Alleluia

John 6:63c, 68c

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:60-69

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said,
"This saying is hard; who can accept it?"
Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this,
he said to them, "Does this shock you?
What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending
to where he was before?
It is the spirit that gives life,
while the flesh is of no avail.
The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.
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.
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."

As a result of this,
many of his disciples returned to their former way of life
and no longer accompanied him.
Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"
Simon Peter answered him, "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."

Exegesis

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

Joshua, Moses successor, assembled the people at Shechem on Mount Ebal. This is the place where Moses and the people first entered the covenantal relationship with Yahweh. “This day the Lord, your God, commands you to observe these statutes and decrees. Be careful, then, to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you are making this agreement with the Lord: He is to be your God and you are to walk in His ways and observe His statutes, commandments and decrees, and to harken to His voice. And today the Lord is making this agreement with you: you are to be a people peculiarly His own...” (Duet 26:16-18a).

In the generations that followed Moses, as the people settled in the Promised Land, Joshua was their leader. Under Joshua the people thrived in the Promised Land. The 12 tribes apportioned the land and lived in harmony. Their faith united them as a people chosen by God for a mission. “Later Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal.” (Josh 8:30). It is there that they united in worship.

Now Joshua is nearing the end of his life and he summoned the leaders of the 12 tribes to gather once again at Shechem on Mount Ebal. First, Joshua reminds the people of the goodness of Yahweh. He recounts the powerful acts of God that freed them from bondage in Egypt and led them safely to the Promised Land. Then Joshua recounted Yahweh’s power continually at work with them in this new land.

Joshua pointed out that serving the Lord would not always be easy, especially in a time of prosperity. He pointed out that even after all the Lord has done some will “forsake the Lord and serve strange Gods.” (Josh 24:20). Joshua then challenged the leaders and the people as a community of faith and as individuals to renew their commitment to Yahweh on the very spot where they first entered the covenant decades earlier. Faith is highlighted as both a communal and an individual choice of the mind, heart and soul.

Psalm 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

Psalm 34 is an individual song of thanksgiving. It is titled *Thanksgiving to God Who Delivers the Just*. “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” Some translations read *savor* how good the Lord is. God wants us to experience His love and goodness. The Lord is Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus, Emmanuel, God is in solidarity with us. He is with us on this journey through life. He is not always in the wind, fire and earthquakes but in the intimate whispers and the silence of our hearts. God wants us to experience, taste and savor His grace and mercy. No where on earth is the gift of God more real, more substantial, more personal than on the Altar of Sacrifice, the Eucharist.

Exegesis (Continued)

Ephesians 5:21-32

Ephesians Chapter 5 is challenging all to live a new life in Christ Jesus. It begins: “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1-2). Our pericope is entitled *The Christian Household*.

While it may be easy to get caught up in right relationships between husbands and wives and family members, there is a deeper calling to live as children of God who is self-giving love. Created in God’s image and likeness we are made for love, radical self-giving love. This innate desire to pour out our life in love is conflicted with a primordial passion for self-serving, self-preserving love that entered our souls through the Fall. Inward focusing love, what Augustine termed concupiscence, leads to isolation and death. It literally leads us on a dead-end path. It is the devil’s desire.

Ephesians is calling us to authentic, agape, self-giving love. We were made from love and for love. As human beings we define ourselves in relationships. God is pure relationship. God is a communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus defines Himself as loving Son in relationship to His loving Father. The Father defines Himself as loving Father in relationship to the Son and to His beloved children. In the bond of marriage, the husband discovers and defines himself as husband by totally giving himself to his wife. Wife discovers and defines herself by giving her life to her husband. In the total gift to the other they can become as one flesh. They lose nothing in the process but find themselves and gain the other.

God is love. Love is a choice. God has no need of us. God chooses us. God desires us as lover desires beloved. “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1-2).

John 6:60-69

Our Gospel passage today concludes the beautiful *Bread of Life Discourse*. It is decision time.

Love requires a response of either acceptance or rejection. There is no middle ground, apathy and indifference constitute rejection. A positive response is necessary. A gift is not a gift until it is accepted. From the Prologue on we have been seeing example after example of acceptance and rejection of Jesus in John’s Gospel. “He came to what was His own, but His own people did not accept Him. But to those who did accept Him he gave the power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...” (Jn 1:11-12). “And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.” (Jn 3:19). On the journey of signs and miracles that is often referred to as from Cana to Cana (2:1-4:54) we see numerous examples of acceptance and rejection of Jesus. Jesus requires choice, each person must either accept or reject Him.

In our current passage the disciples and the smaller group of apostles have seen up close the mighty power of God working in and through Jesus. Recently, they witnessed the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. They experienced Him calming the storm at sea and saw Him walking on the water. He revealed Himself clearly as God in the I AM (*ego eimi*) statements. Now many are ready to leave Him as His sayings are hard to believe, and Jesus assures them that even one of the twelve would betray Him.

Jesus is Truth. He does not back down from the truth that He is giving His life as bread for the life of the world, that He is giving up His body and pouring out His blood. He states clearly, “I AM the Bread of Life.”

Exegesis (Continued)

John 6:60-69

The people had a difficult time with the reality of the need to eat of the flesh of the Son of Man. At the time there were isolated cases of cannibalism which most would have been aware of. The thought was revolting in and of itself. Secondly, *flesh* or *living in the flesh*, is portrayed in a negative way throughout John's Gospel. There is a polemic unraveling between good and evil, light and darkness, Spirit and flesh, etc. Jesus points out clearly, "It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail." The key difference is that Jesus enters our human flesh to redeem it, to raise it up. Divine life has entered the flesh of Jesus and therefore His flesh is Spirit filled. He was conceived by the Spirit. At His baptism the Spirit descended upon Him and remained with Him. It is flesh transformed by the Spirit that gives life. It is bread transformed by the Spirit that becomes Jesus, body, blood, soul and divinity. Therefore, eating His flesh is necessary for eternal life, to transform our flesh and blood, to enter a fusion with divine life.

Simon Peter speaks for the apostles and for us, "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." A few verses prior Jesus is quoted saying: "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by my Father." (6:65) I have always struggled with this saying and had this insight in prayer. After the great proclamation of Peter at Casarea Phillipi, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus responds, "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My heavenly Father." (Matt 16:13). It is the indwelling Spirit of the Risen Lord, of God, that enlightens our hearts and minds to divine presence. A more literal translation of the profession of Peter, "We have come to believe and are convinced," is, "We have come to believe and come to know..." The Greek word that we translate as *convinced* or *know* is *egnocamen*. It means to come to knowledge of or come to full awareness or cognition especially in the sense of being shown or being revealed. So, this again speaks of what St. Augustine called Divine Illumination. The divine presence in us helps us to recognize the divine presence on the altar.

Reflection

I have talked often about my unwavering faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. In recent years as I grow in my faith, I am seeing more clearly the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. Jesus made it very clear, “That where I am, there is also the Father and the Holy Spirit.” On the altar, God, the creator of the universe is fully present, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is three persons, yet profoundly one, undivided in unity.

Jesus assures us that if we open our hearts that He with the Father and the Holy Spirit will dwell within us. At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, “Father may they be one, as You and I are one.” When we approach the altar, we are invited to enter into a common union with the Holy Trinity. When we enter into this mystery, we connect to the source of all that is and we therefore become connected to all of being that is connected to that same source, God. That is why we call this great event, Communion, i.e. common union.

The Gospel this Sunday highlights the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is the bond of love that makes the Father and Son one. It is the Holy Spirit that was breathed into the clay of the earth and man became a living being. It is the Holy Spirit that poured upon the Church at Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit that comes down upon the altar at the consecration. It is the Holy Spirit that transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus. It is Holy Spirit that illumines our hearts and our minds to see with eyes of faith, to see as God sees and to know as God knows. It is the Holy Spirit that is the source of our hope for eternal life. The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life. We are invited to share in this life forever.

In his teaching on the Holy Trinity, St. Augustine used the imagery of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the present age. He pointed to the Old Testament as the story of our Creator God. The Gospels are the accounts of the Eternal Word made flesh. The time of Pentecost is the present age, and the Gospel of the Holy Spirit is the Gospel that we are now living. Imagine that; we are a part of a Gospel that is still being written!

We are a part of God’s plan. We are constantly being challenged to become the incarnation of the Holy Spirit here and now. The incarnation is not just a static event that occurred in the person of Jesus 2,000 years ago. God seeks the ever-greater incarnation of His loving presence in the world in and through us; in many ways, but most intentionally in Holy Communion, where we are being drawn into the chain of love that flows from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. This is true, first, because God seeks union with us as lover seeks beloved. Secondly, God wants to love others in and through us. We must become a link in the love chain. As Augustine said as he distributed communion, “become what you receive, the body of Christ.”

We are all called to be Spirit filled, Spirit led, and Spirit giving people. We cannot give what we do not have. Like Nicodemus, we must first be born from above with the Holy Spirit. Then led by the Holy Spirit we naturally become Spirit giving people. We are able to love effortlessly because it is Christ who is loving through us. We are able to forgive effortlessly because it is Christ who is forgiving in and through us. It is such that we become the Body of Christ here on earth. We are a part of God’s plan and with that comes overwhelming gratitude and awesome responsibility. So, come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in the Holy Spirit,



Personal Witness

This Sunday we continue to read from the *Bread of Life Discourse* of the *Gospel of John*. As we come to the end of this famous passage we are asked to make a decision: Will we accept this teaching and this gift from God or not? St. Peter reminds us that our eternal life depends on the decision that we make. This is also a wonderful opportunity for us to grow deeper in our understanding and our faith in the profound gift of God's life that He wants to share with us.

Salvation, eternal life, is pure gift. It all begins with God's love for us, the gift that we call the *Primacy of Grace*. St. John writes in his first letter, "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as expiation for our sins." (1 Jn 4:10). The beloved disciple also captured those famous words of Jesus in his Gospel. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son..." All too often that verse is quoted as such. There is a comma and the words of Jesus continue: "... so that those who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life." So, what does it mean to believe in Him? And what does it mean to have eternal life?

During my life, I have had a series of little spiritual breakthroughs or awakenings. One of these came as I was pondering the gift of salvation. I was reflecting on the two major paradigms of salvation in sacred scripture, the Exodus experience and the delivery of the Israelites from their Babylonian Exile. In both historical events the chosen people are set free by the powerful hand of God. I had always looked at salvation as precisely that, the act of God setting people free from the bondage of slavery. In our time it is the equivalent of Jesus setting us free from the bondage of sin and death through the Paschal Mystery and the sacraments of the Church.

My spiritual awakening was seeing salvation not so much as setting us free from something, as God setting us free for something. As the Israelites were set free from Egypt, it was to begin a journey through the desert to the Promised Land. As the Israelites were set free from the exile in Babylon, it was to return to the Promised Land to rebuild their lives, their city and their temple; to make way for the coming of the Messiah. We are set free from sin in Baptism to begin a journey through this life to the Promised Land of heaven, eternal life.

Love must be free, or it would not be love. God allows human freedom at all costs. Gaze at the Cross to see the real cost of human freedom. For us the real cost of the abuse, or misuse of human freedom is eternal death, separation from God's love and life. Yes, we can make that choice; and sadly, many people do. Life is a choice that is put before us every second of our lives. To believe means to accept the gift of life. To have eternal life is to open ourselves to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

There is a famous 12th Century painting by an artist named Hunt that is entitled *The Light of the World*. It portrays Jesus, holding a lantern and knocking on a door. It represents Revelation 3:20 and captures the words of Jesus, "Behold I stand at the door (of your heart) and knock; if you open the door I will enter and dine with you. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on the throne." The door in the painting has no handle on the outside. The door must be opened from within. I keep that painting in my prayer chapel to remind me to open that door every day. Open the door! Accept the gift!

