

## **21st Sunday of the Year.**

**“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”.**

As soon as we wake in the morning we are making choices. Some will be quite insignificant like the decision to get out of bed, others will have more weight like the decision about who to marry or whether to marry at all. Every moment of life presents one choice or another, some will be life changing others will make little difference to anything like whether I have sugar in my tea.

We heard from Joshua today who succeeded Moses who led the people out of slavery. He did not reach the Promised Land that was for Joshua to do. Now actually in the Promised Land with everything looking very good Joshua has an important piece of work to do. The people he was leading had a reputation for complaining and grumbling as soon as things went wrong. In their complaining they forgot the presence of God and the fact that it was patently obvious that it was this God who had brought them into the Promised Land. It would not have happened without him. When things became difficult the people had a history of reverting to the false nature God's of their ancestors. They were fickle and soon lost trust in the true God as soon as their faith was tested. So today Joshua invites them to make up their minds. “If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve.” They replied “We will serve the Lord for he is our God”.

Joshua was wise and great and he knew the importance of choosing correctly, especially the choice about which God in whom to place faith and trust. Some choices did not matter too much but this one was crucial. In fact this one came first and had priority above all the others and influenced all the others.

Why was it so important? Because this choice about serving the Lord was about entering a relationship with God which was life giving and life saving. For Joshua and his followers the Lord who had delivered them from slavery to freedom and brought them into the Promised Land was the true Lord and was waiting to be invited into each of their lives so that he could bring them life and joy. It was crucial for them to make an act of faith in him and this was the fundamental choice which affected all others. Just as the choice of marriage gives a particular shape and pattern to the lives of the partners, so a choice for God produces a way of life that will complete and perfect our story.

Like Joshua, Jesus was faced with the same problem. He presented and offered himself as the Bread of life, the one whose words were the source of the Spirit of God who brings life. Jesus emphasises and insists that only the Spirit he brings will bring life. In fact, Jesus says that unless we eat his flesh we will not have life at all. The temptation often is to think that there are other ways to life but Jesus makes clear that he is the only one. He is in fact the way, the truth and the life.

The flesh he says has nothing to offer and we do well to reflect on what Jesus means by the flesh. He is not talking about his own flesh and blood at this point but about something inseparably part of us. It is not actually flesh but part of us all the same. It is like a badly fitted and loose rudder on a ship that leads us in the wrong direction and certainly away from God. Or like that tendency in human beings to go round and round in circles when we are lost. Jesus is talking about the destructive power of sin which is part of all experience and which will lead us away from God and away from life.

So how can it be recognised? Where do we see it leading us to make the wrong choice which is not a choice for God?

It will always be there, it will be easy to follow and it will make the things of God seem hard, tiring and not worth worrying

about. Prayer is a good example or perhaps the abiding presence of the temptation not to pray. For so many of us prayer will be something we do later on, tomorrow but not now. Either we'll be too tired or too busy. This tendency is clear example of the subtle power of the flesh leading us away from God.

It will also be strong and effective in persuading us that we do not need to come to Mass. And this tendency away from God is always subtle and seems to make so much sense. There will be something essential to do or other things will crowd in, through no fault of our own, preventing us from coming to Mass, from eating and drinking the Lord's body and blood, from listening to his life giving word without which we will not have life in us.

The temptation of the flesh will always seem the right thing to do because we choose to do it ourselves. It will not understand Jesus' command that it is by losing our lives that we find them. And so often we will be encouraged to follow the wrong path because so many others find it a good idea as well. Only later on, having done things that lead us away from God, do we discover the error of our ways. Greed, the selfish accumulation of wealth and power, the contemporary attitude to sexuality as a form of recreation and the view which sees life as an expendable commodity are examples of the subtle power of the flesh leading us away from God.

“What about you, do you want to go away too?” That was the question that Jesus put to Simon Peter who very cleverly did not answer it. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life...” He was keeping his options open and we know that he did in fact disown Jesus the night before Jesus' death.

But today the question is asked of us and it is as relevant today as it was for Peter and the other disciples. There are many

choices for us to make, the power of sin within us would make them look exciting and life giving, innocent and freeing; other people would agree with us but it is all deception. There is a choice we must make which is always the first one and it shapes all the others. That choice is for Jesus alone and it brings a commitment to grow in his love through faith and trust.

Each day is given that we might renew our choice of Jesus and our trust in him. Each day is given that we might learn truly that the Spirit gives life and the flesh has nothing to offer. The words Jesus speaks to us are spirit and they are life.