

SUNDAY 21-B

“Choose to follow Jesus – the Bread of Life.”

A young aboriginal lady had three suitors who were Dené, Cree and Metis. She didn't know which to choose. Finally she gave them a linguistic test, asking each to use the words “liver” and “cheese” in the same sentence. The Dené fellow said, “I don't like liver and I don't like cheese.” The Cree fellow said, “I like liver and I like cheese.” Then the Metis fellow said, “Ahh, you guys, liver alone, cheese mine!”

There is a Portugese saying that states: What is important for us we find time and money for.”

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Recently a young lady, Trina, left a message on my answering machine. It was obvious by her voice that she was in distress. When I called back her mother told me that she was not home and that she was suicidal. Days later we connected and now she was laughing and joking. As I suspected, she was drinking, and told me that was working better for her then the drugs she had been taking. I can understand why to a certain extent, because she grew up in a dysfunctional family where there was addiction, lack of love, and abuse of all kinds. Though baptized, she does not believe in God and has turned to these false gods of alcohol and drugs, instead of dealing with her issues with faith. My response was to point out the dangers, and to promise I would be there when she hit bottom. I consider her actions to be what the bible calls foolishness, yet so prevalent in our society today.

To be human is to be incomplete, to hunger for consummation; to never be satisfied, to experience a certain longing for wholeness that can never be quenched. That creates within us a certain Eros, a divine fire, an energy that longs for union. To negotiate this human predicament we must learn to live a spirituality of living positively our human incompleteness.

Not to do so is to open ourselves up to the danger of idolatry, the worship of false gods like alcohol, prestige or power. For those whose faith is weak, that has always been the temptation. So it was for the Israelites in their desert wanderings. Not understanding the mysterious ways of the God of their ancestors, they were always tempted to turn back to the fleshpots of Egypt, to the misery with which they were at least familiar.

In the reading today Joshua challenges them directly to make a choice – other gods that ultimately would never satisfy, or the God of Israel who liberates and protects, but calls for faith. The psalm speaks of this God as one who hears us, who rescues, is near, saves and redeems the poor. In the end, Joshua and the people choose the God of Israel.

The gospel also presents us with a choice. Jesus bluntly states that unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood we cannot have life within us. He then talks of his ascension, the spirit that gives life, and the need to believe. What is this all about?

Jesus is saying that he is the only one who ultimately can satisfy this human longing for completeness and wholeness. We must choose him in total trusting faith. Not only that, to eat his flesh and drink his blood means to love and accept others as they are, for they are his Body. Spelled out, that means to love our enemies, forgive our abusers, let go of revenge, bless those who persecute us, and do good to those who hurt us. He promises that those who do this, who put their faith in him and learn to love all others, will have eternal life. They will already experience the reign of God in their lives here on earth.

The people disputed among themselves, did not understand, lacked faith, and could not make that choice. We know that many stopped following Jesus at that point. And since faith is always a free act, Jesus leaves the disciples free as well. Thankfully, Peter speaks for the disciples who do understand and believe, and they choose to stay with him.

That is our choice also. To believe in Jesus and follow him is to be caught up in the whole dynamic movement of his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension back into heaven. It is to live the Paschal Mystery. Have we chosen this? Have we truly chosen Jesus and let go of false gods? Are we now experiencing the peace and joy of eternal life, or are we still ambivalent?

The reading from Ephesians provides us with a picture of that eternal life already present for those who believe, choose and follow Jesus. Kindness, forgiveness, tenderness and sacrificial love abound. We are empowered to love as Christ loved us, and when we act like God, we get to feel like God – peace and joy.

Paul uses the relationship within marriage to illustrate life in Christ. Husbands and wives are to be mutually submissive, letting go of the need to be right, and letting go of the need to have power and control. This is revolutionary love – trying to answer each others needs rather than seeking to have only their needs met.

A friend, Wesley Jamieson of Tri-City Surveys, is an example of someone who has chosen to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus this way. He stayed with me in Beauval whenever his work took him north, and each night he would call his wife Donna just to chat and see how her day went. I marvelled at this and commented that would get rather expensive. He replied that it was not an expense, it was an investment! That is biblical wisdom.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is our opportunity to exercise our faith. We believe that this is really the Body and Blood of Jesus. And we commit ourselves and are empowered to go out and live the Eucharist by loving everyone in need as Christ loved us, to “eat his Body” out there in the world as well. In this action, we have eternal life.

So, if you want to have eternal life, believe and choose to follow Jesus – the Bread of Life.