

SUNDAY 21-B (HOMILY 03)

“The Journey of Faith”

(Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:32-5:2, 21-32; John 6:53, 60-69)

If we want to have eternal life, we must believe in and choose to follow Jesus – the Bread of Life.

The readings today take us on a journey of faith. That journey begins with the first reading. The Israelites are in the desert, about to cross into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. It is Joshua who replaces Moses as the leader. His single minded concern is that the people let go of false gods, the gods of other nations, and place their complete and total faith in the one God of their ancestors, the one God who communicated with Moses on the mountain and in the desert. To their credit, the people are able to do so, at least on this occasion. However, we know from the scriptures that they were not faithful to that profession of faith over the following centuries. This profession of faith would then remain as a constant test of their fidelity to the one God of their ancestors.

That same test of faith applies to us as well. We are invited to look within our own lives, to identify any false gods that we might have clung to for support or identity. Any addiction, whether it be chemical addiction, or process addiction like workaholism, can be seen as a false god that we have to let go of.

The Gospel takes us a step further on this journey of faith. It is that same concern that Jesus, in the gospel, places before his disciples and the people who are following him. The call to faith in one God that Joshua placed before the Israelites now becomes a call to faith in the person of Jesus as Messiah, as Son of God, as Lord.

Jesus is not asking his disciples to eat flesh and drink blood; he is asking them to eat the Spirit-filled flesh and blood of the Son of Man. Access to Jesus is impossible without God’s initiating act. The Twelve must choose whether to accept or reject the offer God has made to them in Jesus.

When Jesus says “I am the bread from heaven” these images of bread are transformed by his very person. Metaphors that pointed to God in the OT now point to God through Jesus. This focusing of the rich OT symbols on the person of Jesus is the context in which the Eucharistic images are to be read and indeed out of which they grow. When Jesus says that his flesh is the “living bread that came down from heaven”, he is saying that he himself is the food that gives life, not the manna or the multiplied loaves. And it is through eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood, through the Eucharist, that the believer partakes of this food.

According to Krystyna Higgins in her commentary in this Sunday’s *Living With Christ*, here we have the incarnation in a nutshell. Jesus transforms bread and wine, the ordinary stuff of human sustenance, into his own body and blood, which he offers as our spiritual

food and drink. The level of intimacy with God to which we are called every time we gather around the Eucharistic table is an awesome gift which we should never take for granted, but welcome with a humble and grateful heart. It is a sharing already now in the eternal life that Jesus wants to give us.

The reading from Ephesians takes us another step further on our journey of faith. St. Paul provides us with a picture of that eternal life already present for those who believe in, 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 other's needs rather than seeking to have only their needs met.

Mat Talbot was an Irishman this Eucharistic spirituality. He struggled all his life with an alcohol addiction, before the days of Alcoholics Anonymous. Try as he might by will power alone, he could not stop this destructive habit. Finally, he had a conversion experience in which God's love touched him. From then on, he went to daily mass every morning. In a sense, he replaced the alcohol with the Eucharist, with the bread of life, and sought to help out other alcoholics for the rest of his life. He could be considered the patron saint of all those who struggle with an addiction.

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. 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.