

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday per Annum - B  
Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b;  
Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32;  
John 6:60-69  
Little Flower - 8/25/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel concludes the series of Gospels from Jesus' Eucharistic discourse.

I would suggest that today's Gospel, understood in the context of last Sunday's Gospel, is further evidence of Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist. When *"the Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?'* Jesus said to them, *'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life....'*" [Jn 6:52-54]. At the conclusion of today's Gospel, we are told that *"many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him."*

Clearly, his listeners understood that Jesus was saying that the gift he was going to give them really was his Body and Blood. If they did not understand it that way, they had no reason to stop following Jesus. On the other hand, if they had misunderstood him, Jesus had every reason to explain that he was only speaking figuratively.

In the final analysis, belief in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist requires faith. After the Consecration, the appearances of bread and wine remain. As the Jews of Jesus' time said, *"this saying is hard..."* However, if we take Jesus' Eucharistic discourse seriously, not to believe in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist ultimately is not to believe in Jesus himself.

Today's first reading, however, also reminds us of another dimension of faith. Faith is not simply believing. To believe or not believe is a choice and a decision. Joshua challenged the people, *"If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve...."* They responded, *"We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."*

In today's second reading, St. Paul talks about marriage. Whenever we struggle with faith in Jesus or faith in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist, it is important to remember that all intimate relationships, especially marriage, require faith. When a couple chooses to marry, they make an act of faith in each other. They choose to believe that their partner has allowed them to see him or her as he or she really is. They choose to believe that their partner understands the commitments of marriage as they do and is willing to embrace those commitments. Faith in Jesus, faith in the Eucharist, and faith in others all involve a choice and a decision to believe and to trust.

Paul concludes today's second reading with *"This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church."* The Latin Bible uses the word *sacramentum* or *sacrament* for the Greek word for mystery. As Catholics we believe that the Eucharist is unique among the sacraments. The Eucharist is the only permanent sacrament. In other words, bread and wine once changed into the Body and Blood of Christ remain the body and blood of Christ as long as they are in the form of bread and wine. Of all the sacraments, marriage is most like the Eucharist. We say that the love of Christian man and woman in marriage both symbolizes and embodies Christ's love for the Church. Therefore, the deeper the couple's love for each other, the more Christ is present in that love. Even in the best marriages, the love at the beginning of the marriage is like tinsel that must mature into deep gold. Like the Eucharist, then, Christ remains really present in the love of Christian couples for each other.

My brothers and sisters, the end of Jesus' Eucharistic Discourse is the perfect weekend for our parish picnic. You have often heard me pray, "Good and gracious God, meals are sacred times of intimacy with you and one another..." Although the Eucharist is the high point of our life in Christ, whenever we celebrate a meal with family or friends or parish, we celebrate and deepen our intimacy with God and others.