

22 AUGUST 2021

# Sunday Message

21<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year B • Psalter Week 1

## WILL I STAY OR WILL I GO?

JOHN 6:60-69

In today's first reading, Joshua challenges the people of Israel. Make up your minds once and for all, he tells them. "If you will not serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve." It is decision time.

In today's Gospel, Jesus puts a similar challenge to his followers. Because of his teaching about the living bread, many of his followers turned their backs on him. They found his teaching too hard to stomach. They walked away. So Jesus asks the Twelve, "Do you wish to go away too?"

This is not simply a question from history. Jesus puts it to each of us today also: "Do you wish to go away too? Are you sick of my teaching about the living bread? Are you fed up with my talk about forgiving your enemies? Are my statements about justice and honesty too much for you? Are you turned off when I take the side of the marginalised? Are you embarrassed by the cross? Is the command to turn the other cheek a little OTT?"

It's decision time. It always is. Do you wish to go away, too? Or do you wish to stay? Either way, why? Before you answer, listen to the answers of the Israelites to Joshua and of the twelve apostles to Jesus. The Israelites say: "There is no way that we will forsake the Lord to serve other gods. Look at all God has done for us." And Peter takes it on himself to answer for the apostles: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and we know that you are the Holy One of God." ■

### SAY

Say with Peter: "Lord, you have the words of eternal life. I have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

### LEARN

Each Christian is called to say a personal "yes" to Jesus.

Following Jesus means having to make hard choices.

### DO

Think about the faith that you profess. What does it mean to you to say you are a Catholic? Can other people see that you are?

### PRAY

Pray for those you know who no longer go to church or no longer believe in God. Pray also for those who introduced you to the faith and brought you up in it.

## REFLECT

It seems that every year, more and more people are walking away from the Church, and for a variety of reasons. Some, due to their sexuality or domestic situation, do not feel welcome; others feel betrayed by the long litany of church scandals; still others have been hurt by a priest or religious; some feel excluded by the Church's clericalism and misogyny; some have simply lost faith. Today's Gospel offers an opportunity to think about why we choose to stay when so many others have not. There are three main reasons why I choose to remain in the Church.

First, and most important, is the person of Jesus Christ. For me, Jesus is the one who gives life meaning. For me, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – literally. For me, life makes sense only because God's Son took on flesh like mine and

died on a cross to save me from oblivion. In the difficult times, when scandals threaten to overwhelm me, I always try to distinguish between Jesus and his Church, which is made up of fallible human beings. Even when the Church lets me down, Jesus never lets me down. Even when the Church disappoints, Jesus never disappoints. We should never let the failures of the Church cut us off from Jesus.

Second, I stay because of the example of so many people who by their lives of love and service show me the meaning of Christianity. People like Fr Peter McVerry, who out of love God and neighbour, has devoted his life to caring for the young homeless of Dublin and elsewhere. People like 27-year-old American Jean Donovan who was martyred in El Salvador 40 years ago. She knew she was putting her life

at risk by remaining in that war-ravaged country, but she stayed there anyway. She stayed out of love of God and God's people. She followed Jesus even to the cross.

Third, I stay because of the consoling knowledge that we are a Church of sinners. I'm not perfect. Despite my best efforts, I fail all the time. I can be moody and hard to live with. But I look around, and I see this is something we all have in common in the Church from the top down – we are all frail, fragile, broken people, who sin and fail, and sin and fail again. But I know that, even despite my failures, despite the Church's failures, God loves me – loves us – anyway, and that God will never abandon me. God is always on my side, and with God always on my side, there is no good reason why I should walk away. ■



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me;  
save the servant who trusts in you, my God.  
Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all  
the day long.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who cause the minds of the faithful  
to unite in a single purpose,  
grant your people to love what you command  
and to desire what you promise,  
that, amid the uncertainties of this world,  
our hearts may be fixed on that place  
where true gladness is found.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18

A reading from the book of Joshua.

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel  
together at Shechem; then he called the elders,  
leaders, judges and scribes of Israel, and  
they presented themselves before God. Then  
Joshua said to all the people: "If you will not  
serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish  
to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors  
served beyond the River, or the gods of the  
Amorites in whose land you are now living. As  
for me and my House, we will serve the Lord."

The people answered, "We have no intention  
of deserting the Lord our God and serving  
other gods. Was it not the Lord our God who  
brought us and our ancestors out of the land of  
Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those  
great wonders before our eyes and preserved  
us all along the way we travelled and among  
all the peoples through whom we journeyed?  
We too will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 33

Response:

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

- I will bless the Lord at all times,  
his praise always on my lips;  
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.  
The humble shall hear and be glad. (R.)
- The Lord turns his face against the  
wicked

to destroy their remembrance from the  
earth.

The Lord turns his eyes to the just  
and his ears to their appeal. (R.)

- They call and the Lord hears  
and rescues them in all their distress.  
The Lord is close to the broken hearted;  
those whose spirit is crushed he will  
save. (R.)
- Many are the trials of the just man  
but from them all the Lord will rescue  
him.  
He will keep guard over all his bones,  
not one of his bones shall be broken. (R.)
- Evil brings death to the wicked;  
those who hate the good are doomed.  
The Lord ransoms the souls of his  
servants.  
Those who hide in him shall not be  
condemned. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Ephesians 5:21-32

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Ephesians.

Give way to one another in obedience to  
Christ. Wives should regard their husbands as  
they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head  
of the Church and saves the whole body, so  
is a husband the head of his wife; and as the  
Church submits to Christ, so should wives  
to their husbands, in everything. Husbands  
should love their wives just as Christ loved the  
Church and sacrificed himself for her to make  
her holy. He made her clean by washing her in  
water with a form of words, so that when he  
took her to himself she would be glorious, with  
no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but  
holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands  
must love their wives as they love their own  
bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him  
to love himself. A man never hates his own  
body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that  
is the way Christ treats the Church, because  
it is his body – and we are its living parts. For  
this reason, a man must leave his father and  
mother and be joined to his wife, and the two  
will become one body. This mystery has many  
implications; but I am saying it applies to  
Christ and the Church.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words are spirit, Lord,  
and they are life:  
you have the message of eternal life.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

John 6:60-69

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
John.

After hearing his doctrine many of the  
followers of Jesus said, "This is intolerable  
language. How could anyone accept it?" Jesus  
was aware that his followers were complaining  
about it and said, "Does this upset you? What  
if you should see the Son of Man ascend to  
where he was before?"

"It is the spirit that gives life,  
the flesh has nothing to offer.  
The words I have spoken to you are spirit  
and they are life.

"But there are some of you who do not  
believe." For Jesus knew from the outset  
those who did not believe, and who it was that  
would betray him. He went on, "This is why I  
told you that no one could come to me unless

the Father allows him." After this, many of his  
disciples left him and stopped  
going with him.

Then Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about  
you, do you want to go away too?" Simon  
Peter answered, "Lord, who shall we go to?  
You have the message of eternal life, and we  
believe; we know that you are the Holy One of  
God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,

*(all bow during the next three lines)*

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

O Lord, who gained for yourself a people by  
adoption  
through the one sacrifice offered once for all,  
bestow graciously on us, we pray,  
the gifts of unity and peace in your Church.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

The earth is replete with the fruits of your  
work, O Lord;  
you bring forth bread from the earth  
and wine to cheer the heart.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Complete within us, O Lord, we pray,  
the healing work of your mercy  
and graciously perfect and sustain us,  
so that in all things we may please you.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

