

**GN4Y is on summer break. Please enjoy this reflection from the summer of 2018.**

## Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B Ephesians 5:21-32 & John 6:60-69

This week the Bread of Life discourse finally draws to a close. It climaxes with our choice: will we accept that Jesus is our one and only path to God? Seems straightforward enough –we attend church and/or give time to prayer and Scripture study. We have chosen Christ. That is clear and all is well.

Throughout this elaborate story from John's gospel, responses to Jesus have been interwoven with the ideas he proposes. The crowd just wants another free bodily meal. The Jews murmur about Jesus' claim that he could be the incarnation of God's providential manna. They struggle with this idea because it is a logical progression in God's revelation, but it means they will have to surrender power. In the section we hear today, people who have been Jesus' disciples turn away because "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Lastly, the Twelve, with Peter as their spokesperson, profess their faith and commitment to Jesus as the Messiah. Interestingly, this is one of the few times that the author of John names the Twelve, recognizable to John's listeners as the foremost leaders of the Church; they are the Chosen and Powerful. Also of interest is the fact that, while such a strong profession is being made by the Chosen and Powerful, Jesus perceives that the profession has flaws: "Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him."

So the choice to follow Jesus is not so straightforward. I see this all the time in my daily life, when I profess to be compassionate and watch myself judge others or leave them out. We all do this regularly when we claim to be committed to our family or friend and then let ourselves get lost in some other priority that feeds our own selfishness. We have seen it in the latest revelation of child abuse in the attorney general's report on the dioceses of Pennsylvania and the unconscionable cover up of that abuse by members of the hierarchy. Just because we have said we believe in Jesus does not mean we have chosen him through and through.

The selection from Ephesians that we read today is another example of not choosing Christ through and through. This reading compares the relationship of spouses to that of Christ and the Church. It seems to me to be an example of a part of Scripture that is not inspired, or inspired in a very limited way, because it reinforces an oppressive, sexist vision of marriage. While most commentaries quickly point out that the passage requires husbands to love their wives with a Christ-like love, it still requires that women be subordinate to men. Whatever benefits the comparison has are overridden by the subjugation of one part of the human race by the other. The Church is subordinate to Christ, but wives need not be subordinate to their husbands. Yet we read this passage or its sister passage in Colossians 3 yearly from the pulpit and almost all Church writings on marriage quote it as a primary explanation of God's direction for marriage. Really? Of all the Scriptural passages we could be reading on committed love, this is the one that is chosen? This, like the cover up of clerical sexual abuse, demonstrates humans' refusal to take Jesus into our hearts as the Bread of Life. Scripture is full of culturally limited messages, but the Church need not use it for a "go to" passage to justify men dominating women.

What then does it mean to choose Christ and believe that he is the Bread of Life? It means an honest and ongoing examination of our motives. It means challenging others to the same examination. We cannot use positions of power for comfort or ego. We must treat everyone with mercy – whether they are the victim or the offender. Finally, walking away from the Church, even when the commitment seems too hard, is not an option for a true believer. Jesus stayed with humanity through the mess, the rejection, the sin. He kept his clear purpose of loving compassion. God brought about resurrection for the world, even though we did not deserve it. So too we must stay on in our current mess, rejection and sin, invite Jesus to be with us and let God transform us all to new life.

- ❖ What part of living out your beliefs is hardest for you? Why?
- ❖ What is the most life-giving response you can think of to the sexual abuse crisis and its cover-up in the Church? In prayer, invite Jesus to help you work toward change and commit to an action.

©08-17-21 Bernadette Rudolph