

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of Christian commitment. They highlight, in particular, the duty we have to fulfill our commitment before God and before our fellows. They invite us to realize that our conversion and commitment are keys for a successful relationship with God and with one another.

The first reading describes the aftermath of the death of Moses when Joshua took over the leading role of the people of Israel. It shows how he invited the people to renew their Covenant with God by pledging to serve him alone. It also shows how he gave them an example of faithfulness and attachment to the Lord. Finally, the text shows how the people responded unanimously to the invitation by pledging to serve God.

What is behind this text is the idea that the identity of the people of God is constantly threatened by the ambient environment in which they live. There is also the idea that in order to be faithful to God, his people must renew continually his covenant with him. The last idea is related to the truth that there is a permanent temptation for the people of God to behave like anybody else.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as the apostles pledge to remain with Jesus while some of his disciples are leaving him. In fact, the Gospel starts with the reaction of some of the disciples who find it hard to believe in the words of Jesus about the bread of life.

It gives also the response of Jesus who, instead of backing off, maintains that his words are Spirit and life. Then it denounces the attitude of those who do not believe and it gives the reason why it is so. The Gospel finishes with the statement of Peter who, on behalf of the other apostles, confesses the divinity of Jesus and the assurance that he gives for eternal life.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk to you about the crisis of Eucharist. In fact, when some of the disciples of Jesus were murmuring, shocked and declared that his saying was hard and unacceptable, they were expressing the crisis in which they were plunged.

This was not a crisis about the simple words of Jesus about the bread he gives and which gives life. It was a deep crisis around the person of Jesus who is at the center of the Eucharist.

That crisis is not something of the past; even today it happens in our midst. For instance, some people do not believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Others perhaps believe in his presence in the Eucharist, but do not allow Jesus to be truly present in their lives and in what they do in life.

When there is a disconnection between our reception of the Eucharist and what we say or do for the remaining of the day, there is a crisis. Some others might very well receive the Holy Communion, but suddenly build barriers that prevent them from being transformed by what they receive.

Anytime we do so and that the Eucharist does not have any impact on us, we are not different from those who were listening to Jesus, but refused to trust him and his word that he was the bread of life. The result in the end is very simple: we make Jesus a

prisoner of the tabernacle, that is, we receive him here; we adore him here, but at the same time, we leave him here like a jewel that is locked in a safe.

Can this crisis be resolved? Yes, of course. How? Well, by continually renewing our faith in Jesus anytime we celebrate the Holy Mass. This is exactly what the people of Israel have done by renewing their covenant, as we heard in the first reading.

That is why we have to understand that Jesus can never be approached from the outside, but always from within, in faith. As Jesus himself says, “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life”. That is the circle of spiritual life, namely that the Spirit is received when we open our hearts to the message of Jesus; the Spirit, in turn, leads us to Jesus and to the deepening of his message.

Does it mean that we who stay in the Church never had a crisis? I believe that the problem is not there. In fact, whatever might be the allegations of those who quit, we stay inside the Church because, like Peter, we have found in Jesus the words of eternal life.

The context of crisis at the time of Jesus is like that of today in which we live and where the Church is decried and reviled because of sex abuse and many other things. Some people just say to us, “why do not you leave the Church”? We do stay, indeed, not because the Church is perfect, or because it has all the answers to our questions, but because we find in it the truth of Jesus, which is in its essence more than the human weaknesses, faults and limitations.

But at the same time, to remain in the Church becomes a challenge we have to face on a daily basis by living according to the values of the kingdom. That is why it would be a mistake to take our belonging to the Church as something granted. We have to renew it continually at the example of the Jews that Joshua invited to renew their covenant with God. Let us, then, pray that God may help us to trust him and renew our commitment with him. May God bless you all!

Joshua 24: 1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Ephesians 5: 21-32; John 6: 60-69



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