

August 26, 2018

Jos 24:1-2a,15-17,18b; Eph 5:21-32 (long); Jn 6:60-69

There may be a lot of things that we can have questions about, many things that on first glance seem crazy or wrong - but this is only because we don't know the deeper truth behind them. When someone you love is going through a difficult time, or an addiction, or an illness that you don't understand you don't say that unless you completely understand then you can't believe that they are hurting or sick and can't support them - you assume that there is something going on beneath the surface that you don't quite get, and you remain there for them.

We have been listening to Jesus in the past few weeks speaking about the "bread of life." He began the whole large speech by saying: *This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent* (that means him). He was about to get into some pretty wild stuff. Jesus says that he is the bread of life, and that anyone who eats of him will live forever, and just last week we heard the part of this speech where Jesus says that the "bread" is his own flesh and blood. He says that his flesh and blood is true food and drink - he doesn't say something like "my words to you are *like* food and the presence of my Spirit in you is *like* drink" - by the words he uses he makes it clear that he is speaking literally. When people doubt it he doesn't say "oh, you thought I meant my actual body ... gross ... no I meant it figuratively," he actually repeats the statements with stronger language. He then later says that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in him and he in them (that they are joined).

We heard in the Gospel that a lot of the people with Jesus decided "I'm outta here!" and they left. If they had stayed they would have been able to see how in the Eucharist Jesus provides his body and blood under the appearance of bread and wine for us to consume - there was something more to the hard words he spoke. Just taking words that don't sound right, and throwing them out when you don't get them, doesn't help you to be with your loved one who suffering, and does not help you to reach the table of Jesus' body and blood and be joined to him. There are other words that we can throw out too quickly without getting to the deeper thing being said underneath - if we throw it out too quickly, we can miss an important message.

There are some words in our second reading that can cause us to pull back: *Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. ... so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything*. Many people have taken these words and others like them and used them to oppress others or as a reason to walk away in disgust and not hear what Paul is saying. The truth behind these seemingly hard words requires a deeper understanding.

In Paul's time, a wife was indeed subjected to the husband - and in many parts of the culture she was considered his property. She had no right to his love, she had a duty to serve him and, in fact, he could get rid of her anytime he wanted. He is drawing a parallel to Jesus' relationship to the church. He is saying that that is the status of our relationship with Jesus. We have no rights, only duties to God and God does not have to do anything for us. Despite this, God comes to us as Jesus Christ and allows himself to be subordinated to his people and even be killed by them - this is explained more in the letter to the Philippians. God does this to provide a body for us to join with (like husband and wife join in one body - see the reference to Genesis Paul makes). Only we join with Jesus' body through Baptism and Eucharist and not through sex. We are then called upon to respond to this act of love by subordinating ourselves to Jesus in love.

In the reading, Paul is really calling upon the husbands to follow Christ's example and (although in the culture they are superior), to submit themselves in love to their wife. The wife is then called to respond to this by submitting to the husband. That way they both reach the same point. The telling verse is the first one in this passage: *Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ* - not just the female of the species. In today's reading, and all the literature in the Bible where God portrays the relationship between God and humans as a marriage - the humans are always the wife and God always the husband. If we apply this biblical principle to this passage, that puts both husband and wife in the human marriage in the position of the wife with God as the husband. When Paul says wives "should do xyz" - he's not trying to say that this is the way the Christian husband and wife should be. Paul is saying that the martial customs of his time helps us to understand the way *we all* should relate to God. In reality this passage calls upon the humans to submit to each other and then mutually submit to God.

Jesus is God come from heaven to consummate the marital relationship with his people by the total loving self-gift of his body that joins us in one flesh with him. Will we respond with such total self-gift and fidelity back to God? Will we offer to God our whole mind, heart, and body? In the midst of many being unfaithful to God will we be able to speak as Joshua did in our first reading: *Decide today who you will serve, As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Far be it from us to forsake the Lord. Far be it from any of us to forsake the Lord who has given us life and who unites himself to his bride the church by giving us his body that we can abide in him. Can you pray for the same faith that Peter expressed in the Gospel? Can you face of the mysterious realities of God and subordinate yourself, and your doubts and inability to understand, to the one who God has sent? Will you turn to the Lord for enlightenment and say with Peter: Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life.*