

My Dear People of God,

Today we celebrate the twenty first Sunday of the year and also come to the end of our journey through the **'Bread of Life Discourse'** in the gospel of John chapter 6. Last Sunday, we read that Jesus said to the crowds: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." In response, the Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And in a rebuttal, 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, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him"** He could not have been any clearer than this!

Today we come to the moment of choice. In life, there are decisive moments when one has to come out of the shadows and declare where one's loyalties truly lie, or to take a definitive stand or to make a definite commitment one way or another. It is said that we are a product of the choices we make. Our first reading as well as the gospel reading today provide us with a splendid example of this.

In the first reading, the people of Israel still on their Exodus journey now under the leadership of Joshua (after the death of Moses) are at that critical moment of choice. Joshua places before them, a choice that will shape their own self-identity and will determine the path they and their descendants would take for the rest of their lives. He said to them: **"...decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling."** The good news is that, they chose serve the Lord.

This was a major decision for the people of Israel. If they chose to follow other gods, they would be cursed; but if they chose to follow the Lord, the true God, they would be blessed. It was a stern and stark choice which represents a rather forbidding morality. Jesus on the other hand, gave a different perspective, to obey not under a threat of punishment but out of love.

One of the greatest gifts God has given to us human beings is the freedom of choice. No doubt we would have an easier life if God pulled all the strings. If we were God's puppets, then we would make only good choices. But that would make automatons out of us. It would make sin impossible, but at the same stroke it would make virtue impossible. The fact that God respects our freedom is a sign of his love for us.

In the gospel reading, we now come to the decisive moment of the Bread of Life discourse. After presenting Himself as the bread of life, the true bread that really satisfies and leads to eternal life, some could not believe it. They said: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" The gospels tells us that, sadly as a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him! Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"

Simon Peter answered him, "***Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.***"

My dear brothers and sisters, these words are addressed to us too. It is the same choices that we face today. Ultimately, it is not the Lord who leaves us, but we who may leave the Lord. We need to make our own, the words of Peter: ***Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.***

It is important however to know that choices have consequences. If we choose to believe that He is the bread of life, then our lives, manner of living and choices should reflect that He is our life and that we have nowhere better to go.

Thanks and God bless

Fr Simon Peter