

21st. Sunday in Ordinary Time

Some of us find it difficult to make hard decisions. We try to weigh up both sides of an argument before we declare whose side we are on. We often look to people that we trust to give leadership for us in the decisions we make.

Today we meet Joshua, a man who had earned the respect of the people as he had journey with them through the desert towards the promised land. We meet him at a critical moment in the history of the Israelite people. We hear him say to the assembled people, “If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve.” If they were for the God who brought them out of Egypt and was now giving them the Promised Land, then they had to show that by their faithfulness to God. If they wanted to go back to the God’s of their ancestors, then now was their chance to go. But they could no longer be called God’s people. Joshua declared his position. “As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.” The people who were given the choice to leave were also able to say, “We too will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

Today we get to the point in the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel where Jesus demands that his disciples make a choice about him. The focus is no longer upon the crowd who were listening to Jesus but upon those

who had begun to follow Jesus and were calling themselves his disciples. Many of them were saying to each other that they could no longer accept what Jesus was teaching. When Jesus told them that he was giving them his flesh to eat they found this intolerable language.

But Jesus does not back down or apologise for what he has said. He reinforces the understanding that he had become fully one with us by calling himself the “Son of Man” and asking, “What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? For people to come to faith in Jesus they had to accept both his humanity and his divinity. It can be more difficult for us to believe that Jesus was human than to believe that he was God. It means that we have to accept that God reveals himself to us in everything that God has created. It means that we must be ready to look for God in the world that God loves.

It means too that we must be ready to look for where God is at work in the Church that we are part of. More and more we are forced to recognize the sinfulness of the Church that we love. We are forced to look at our history and admit that we are part of a community that has not been faithful to the one who has called us to make him present in the world. We have not been faithful to the ones we have been called to love. In the letter that Pope Francis has written this week to the People of God, in

response to the report of detailed sexual abuse by clergy and religious, he says, “With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives.”

Pope Francis calls the whole Church to conversion. “While it is important and necessary on every journey of conversion to acknowledge the truth of what has happened, in itself this is not enough. Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history.”

There are many people who have found it very difficult to stay with a Church that has been so humiliated by the revelations of sexual abuse. Pope Francis is inviting to stay with the Church and to change it. “This awareness of being part of a people and a shared history will enable us to acknowledge our past sins and mistakes with a penitential openness that can allow us to be renewed from within. Without the active participation of all the Church’s members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be

successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.”

In today’s gospel Jesus reminds his disciples that it is the work of God that draws us to him and makes us his disciples. And yet that work of God will not bear fruit unless we respond and say yes to the invitation that is offered to us. Jesus knows that even among the twelve there is a betrayer. He asks them all “What about you, do you want to go away too?” In a beautiful way Jesus gives them the freedom to leave him. At the same time, he makes it clear that to continue to follow him demands a choice.

Maybe we are hearing Jesus saying something like that to us too. Do we really make a choice to follow the way that Jesus leads? Does the commitment that we made to live as a member of Catholic Community need to be renewed? Renewing our commitment to be a follower of Jesus will not make us perfect. But it will make us more aware of the forgiveness and love that Jesus offers us to live each day generously and for others. Renewing our commitment to Jesus will help us to realise how much we need him. Peter was able to speak out for the twelve and for us when he said, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.”