

Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 26, 2018  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

In today's first reading, the people of Israel are facing a problem. They are settled into the promised land, but their leader is getting old. They haven't forgotten servitude in Egypt, liberation by Moses and purification in the wilderness. It made them ready for the conquest of Canaan. We remember that Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho." That was just the beginning. After that, he defeated the Amorites in what became Judea, took the southern lands around Gaza, and advanced north past the Sea of Galilee - victory through the power of God: "I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you (Josh 24:12)." Now the people of Israel are at peace with new neighbours and ancient kin. They're getting to know them: trade and dialog; friendship and love; options and choice. "Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living." Will they serve the Lord who freed them, delivered them, protected them; the God of Moses who demanded much, the God of Joshua who gave them all?

This choice confronts us every day. Comfort can make us complacent: satisfied with riches, forgetful of our dependence on God. Scandal and cover up can make us question our leaders, and justly so:

Josh 24:1-2, 15-17, 18  
Ps 34  
Eph 4:32-5:1-2, 21-32  
Jn 6:53, 60-69

"The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." Ideas presented by our neighbours can make us wonder. But the teachings of the Church were given by Jesus to the apostles, and they do not change. Instead, our understanding deepens as the Holy Spirit brings us to the truth. This was the promise made by Jesus at the Last Supper. "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things (Jn 14:26)." This is why Jesus "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." He said, "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (Jn 16:7)." Jesus sent the Spirit to Paul, who gave the Church teachings about marriage. "A man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Their indissoluble union lived with fidelity is fruitful. It requires each to be subject to the other, giving themselves to the other with a total gift of self: body, sexuality, fertility; giving themselves as Christ gave himself; receiving new life from God as Christ rose to new life in glory. God gives the joy of sex to man and wife, but sexual expression outside the bond of marriage is grave sin. This is clear in the case of cardinal and seminarian, priest and layperson, priest and minor. But it's also true among the faithful, since we're all called to holiness.

"When many of his disciples heard this, they said: 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'" It's never easy to be a disciple. We're called to believe and practice a sexuality that is at odds with what our culture provides, while knowing the failures of those who seemed to be closest to the Lord. We can take some consolation in how the Church is improving. The archdiocese has a new Diocese Safe Environment Office. They will give new policies which will be enacted in the parishes. But our hope is in Jesus, and the Eucharist that he gives us. The disciples of Jesus were called to eat his body and drink his blood. They didn't understand. "Many of his disciples turned back, and no longer went about with him. But others remained. They believed that his words were spirit and life, the words of eternal life from the Holy One of God. The Eucharist that Jesus would institute at the Last Supper gives strength and unity and his presence among us. You're invited to join us on Thursday for prayer, fasting and adoration. We will seek reparation for the sins of the Church, so that we can all say with Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."