

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
August 23, 2009

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

This Saying Is Hard

Hey guys, what do you think of that line from our second reading: *“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands... .”* Last weekend, Fr. Zeke was already anticipating this controversial statement from this week’s second reading. He joked about it with one of the women of the parish after Mass. In the ensuing conversation, someone else shared a story about a relative of his who got up and walked out of Mass when she heard this reading. The saying was too hard for her to accept.

Unfortunately, many hear this controversial line and get side-tracked and don’t bother even listening to the rest of the passage. And they quickly forget the line that precedes it: *“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* If they looked at the entire passage, they would clearly see that this is not a sexist discussion at all. It is a passage about mutual subordination and love between husbands and wives. And it uses as an example the love between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, which is often referred to as the Bride of Christ. St. Paul concludes the reading with the statement: *“This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.”*

When a man and woman become husband and wife, they become one flesh, and neither can hate their own flesh. The husband is called to be willing to sacrifice himself for his wife just as Christ did for us. Both are unselfishly called to put their own interests second, and the good of their union, their marriage first. Their union is meant to be based on mutual love, respect, and submission. It’s when individual self-interests take center stage, by either party, that marriages go bad. It’s when our individual self-interests get out-of-hand that our relationship with Christ goes bad as well.

I mentioned the woman who walked out of church because the statement about being subordinate to her husband was too hard to accept. And in our gospel we hear a continuation of our story from last week about how many of Jesus’ disciples found His teachings about eating His flesh and drinking His blood difficult to understand and accept. Today we see how they got up and left because: *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”* Jesus tells them that words He has spoken to them are Spirit and life, and yet they still do not believe. Maybe if He said that He was just kidding, or that it wasn’t important, the disciples wouldn’t have left. But He couldn’t do that because He had to speak the truth. The apostles recognized that Jesus was Holy One of God; they continued to follow Him and believe in Him even though there was much that they could not understand.

There are many of the Church’s teachings that we can find difficult to understand and accept. But it is important not to just get up and leave the Church when faced with these situations. We must continue to believe even when we can’t understand. We need to model ourselves after the apostles, not those who left and returned to their former way of life. And the Church, like Jesus, cannot change its teachings to keep people happy and keep them from leaving. She must speak the truth.

Some want to pick and choose what they believe based on their acceptance and their

understanding.

- Some want to leave because they think women should be allowed to be ordained to the priesthood.
- Some want to leave because they think that abortion is a personal right and not the Church's business.
- Some want to leave because the Church does not condone them having sexual relations outside of marriage.
- Some want to leave because they disagree with the Church's teaching against contraception.
- Some want to leave because they disagree with the Church's teaching regarding marriage as the union between one man and one woman.
- Some don't want to believe in the requirement to confess their sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Some don't believe that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Some don't believe in the infallibility of the pope.
- Some don't believe that it is mortally sinful to skip coming to Mass on Sunday.
- Some don't believe in the teaching on purgatory.

There are a lot of teachings and doctrines that are difficult to understand. There are teachings that are hard and difficult to accept. But that is what we are called to do; to accept them in faith. Reflect on those areas where you struggle to accept Church teaching and pray. Pray for understanding, but first pray for faith. Pray that you can respond like the apostles who believed even though they did not understand; who followed Jesus because they believed that He was the Holy One of God.

In our first reading Joshua challenge the people saying: ***"If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve."*** The people reflected on all the miraculous deeds that God had lovingly done for them and they answered: ***"We also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."***

Are you willing to be subordinate to Christ, our Bridegroom, and serve Him out of love? The Church is His Bride. They are one flesh. They will not steer you wrong. Continue to believe and follow in faith even when matters are difficult to understand and accept. Choose to serve the Lord, for He is our God.

Deacon Joe Hulway