

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

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The “Bread of Life” Discourses (five of five)

Sources:

SCB: ([St Charles](#))

Aquinas: (on [Psalm 34](#))

Augustine: (on [Psalm 34](#))

RC: ([Cantalamessa](#))

S: ([Sacerdos](#))

Augustine: ([Tractate 27](#))

SH: ([David Scott & Scott Hahn](#))

S:

- **THEME OF THE READINGS** - Although the Gospel passage is the conclusion of chapter 6 of John, and the crisis among Jesus' followers is occasioned by the realism of his teaching on the Eucharist, the overall theme of today's readings is no longer Eucharistic. Instead it is the decision to follow the Lord or not in the face of difficulties that takes center stage. Joshua (*First Reading*) makes clear to the tribes of Israel that following Yahweh is no easy undertaking. Even in the wake of Jesus' miracles and signs, it was too hard for some of his disciples (*Gospel*). Today, many are challenged by the teaching of the Church on issues such as the respective roles of men and women in God's plan, represented in perhaps its most characteristic expression in today's Second Reading from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

1st Reading - Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When they stood in ranks before God, Joshua addressed all the people: "If it does not please you to serve the LORD, 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. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods. For it was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very

eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among the peoples through whom we passed. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

SCB:

- Joshua is the sixth book of the Old Testament and is named after the one to whom Jewish tradition attributes authorship. However, as we presently have it, it cannot be entirely his work as some passages point to events which occurred at a later date.
- Joshua (Greek: *Jesus*, Hebrew: *Yeshua*) was the person designated by Moses to succeed him in the governing of Israel. Moses passed all his authority on to Joshua, with the exception of his priestly powers, which went to Eleazar. Joshua (the name means Yahweh is salvation) had his name changed from Hoshea (salvation) by Moses (Numbers 13:16). It was Joshua who led the Hebrews to victory over the Amalekites while Moses prayed (Exodus 17:8-16). He was elected as the tribe of Ephraim's representative in the group of 12 sent to reconnoiter the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:8). He and Caleb are the only people who were over the age of 20 when the Jews left Egypt who lived to enter the promised land; all the rest died in punishment for their infidelity (Numbers 14:30-38; 31:26-65; 32:13).

Psalm 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

The LORD has eyes for the just, and ears for their cry. The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

Many are the troubles of the just one, but out of them all the LORD delivers him; he watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken.

Aquinas:

- Next when he says *they have cried out*, he describes the effect of divine providence, with respect first to the good and then to the wicked, at *the death of the sinners*. On the first point he does two things: he shows first how the ears of the lord bend toward the prayers of the just; then he shows how the eyes of the lord are upon them, at *the lord is near*.
- And so he says *they have cried out*. The prayer of the saints is said to be a crying out, as in Isaiah 19: *for they will cry out to the lord at the face of their oppressor*. And at the end of James: *their cry entered the ears of the lord of Hosts*. Now a cry

- is a loud voice. The prayer of the saints is a loud voice for two reasons: because of the depth of love and the length of the prayer, for they pray for all eternity. As Matthew 6 says: *seek first the kingdom of God. And the lord heard them* because he has given me to seek. Psalm 119: *I cried out to the lord in tribulation, etc.*
- Next follows the effect of being heard: *and from all tribulations, etc.*, such that they do not suffer these trials. Or if they do suffer, still they will not be overwhelmed. As Hebrews 11 says: *they have been made strong in war*. Or, it could signify that they become liberated from Limbo, as Zacharias 9 says: *you however by the blood of the testament have led the prisoners out of the pit, etc.* And Psalm 53: *the poor man cried out, and the lord heard him, and from all, etc.*
 - Now when he says *the lord is near*, he shows how the eyes of the lord are upon the just. On this he does three things: first he describes the merit of the just; second their imminent danger, at *many are the afflictions*; third the help he offer them, at *and from all these*.
 - Now some people are truly in a miserable state and yet do not realize it and thus are not contrite. They do not receive mercy.
 - For it is necessary to recognize one's misery by heartfelt bemoaning. And so he said *to those who are troubled in heart*. This is the contrition of sins. As Isaiah 66 says: *Whom will I regard except the one poor and little and contrite of spirit, etc.* And Matthew 5: *blessed are those who mourn, etc.* The second thing about the merit of the just he mentions when he says *and the humble of spirit he will save*. He says of spirit and not of words, for as Ecclesiasticus 19 says: *there is one who wickedly humbles himself, and his interior, etc.* Therefore, the humble in spirit, who have true humility in their heart, will be saved. Proverbs 29: *He will raise up the humble in spirit.*
 - Next when he says *and from all these he will save them*, he describes the twofold help offered to them: first, they are completely freed (*and from all these the lord will free them*); second, they will not succumb to their tribulations (*the lord guards, etc.*).
 - And so he says *and from all these tribulations the lord will free them*, partly now, but perfectly in the future, when, as Apocalypse 7 says, *they will not hunger nor thirst for more, etc.* Ecclesiasticus 51 says: *you have freed me according to the greatness of your name's mercy*. And 2 Machabees 1: *having been free by God from great peril, let us give great thanks to him.*
 - Just as sight is in the eye, so also courage is in the bones and nerves. And so just as sight is signified through the image of the eye, so also courage and virtue through the image of bone. For bones hold up the body, just as virtue sustains human life. So while in the future he will completely free them, in the meantime he keeps their bones, that is, virtues, which shine in adversity. Another interpretation is that *bones* signifies perfect men, whom the lord guards. Ezechiel 37: *the lord God speaks to these bones, "Behold, I have sent my spirit unto you, and you will live, and I will clothe you with flesh."* *Not one among them will be broken*, for the one God keeps will have no virtue fail him in times of

- trouble. Charity, for example, prevailed against hatred in the saints, for they prayed for their persecutors. Meekness prevailed against anger, for there was no sound of complaint. Patience prevailed against injustice, for they in their suffering gained their own souls. Thus Exodus 12 says of the paschal lamb: *not a bone in it will you break*. Psalm 36: *when he falls, he will not be bruised*. Another interpretation is that *one of these* signifies the predestined, as in John 17: *not one among them will perish, except the son of perdition*.
- And so he says *the death*, meaning both bodily and spiritual. The bodily death is indeed the worst among the wicked, for they are sent to the worst place. As Luke 16 says: *the rich man died and was buried in Hell*. Another reason is that they lose the hope of grace after death. As Proverbs 11 says: *when the wicked man dies, there will be no hope*. Therefore the death of sinners is worst of all, for they die in both body and soul. Now concerning spiritual death, Ephesians 5 says: *rise up from the dead*. This state of the dead is the worst. For since death is the deprivation of life, the greater the good that gets deprived, the worse the death. But spiritual death deprives the soul of the life of grace, which is the best since it comes from God. As 1 Corinthians 6 states: *the man who adheres to God is one spirit*. Therefore, such a death is the worst. Jerome holds that wickedness kills, that is, slays, the impious. This is the kind of wickedness that brings about death to sinners. As Romans 6 states: *the wages of sin is death*.
 - Then when he says *the lord will redeem*, he show how the good are freed from these dangers: first how they are freed from past sins and then how they are protected from future sins, at *and they will not sin*. He says therefore *the lord will redeem the souls of his servants*. Perhaps it may be objected that, if the death of sinners is the worst, then since no one is so just as not to have sinned, it follows that even the death of the just is the worst. To exclude this the Psalmist says *the lord will redeem the souls of his servants*. He will redeem the souls of his servants, in fact, by the price of his own death. Notice he does not say the souls of the free. For those who have been freed have shaken off the yoke of justice. As Romans 6 says: *freed from sin, made servants of God, what fruit did you have*, etc. Thus he says that these freemen have been made servants of God, but they are not redeemed. Only those who have shouldered the yoke of God are redeemed from guilt and punishment by the precious blood of Christ. As 1 Peter 1 says: *not by anything corruptible, like silver or gold, have you been redeemed from your empty life with the paternal tradition, but by the precious blood of Christ, an uncontaminated and immaculate lamb*. Hosea 13 says: *from death I will redeem them*.

2nd Reading - Ephesians 5:21-32

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love

your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.* This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

RC:

- Not only must husbands love their wives, but wives must also love their husbands. Not only must wives be subject to their husbands, but also husbands to their wives, in mutual love and mutual submission.
- In this case, to be subject means to take into account the wishes, opinion and sensitivity of one's spouse; to discuss, not to decide on one's own; to be able to give up one's own point of view. In short, to remember that both are "spouses," that is, literally, persons who are under "the same yoke," freely chosen.
- The Apostle gives Christian spouses as model the relationship of love that exists between Christ and the Church, but he explains immediately in what such love consisted: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." True love is manifested in "giving" oneself to the other.
- There are two ways of expressing one's love for the beloved. The first is to give presents, to fill the other with gifts; the second, much more demanding, consists in suffering for one's spouse.
- God loved us in the first way when he created us and filled us with goods: Heaven, earth, flowers, our bodies, everything is a gift of his. But then, in the fullness of time, in Christ, he came to us and suffered for us, unto death on the cross.
- This is also true in human love. At the beginning, the newly married express their love with gifts. But the time comes for all when presents are not enough. It is necessary to be able to suffer with and for the beloved. One must love despite the limitations one discovers in the other, and despite the moments of poverty and illnesses.
- This is true love which is like Christ's.
- The sign that a couple is passing from seeking to giving love, from eros to agape, is this: Instead of saying "What more could my husband do for me (respectively, my wife) which he still does not do?" one begins to ask: "What more could I do for my husband (or my wife) which I still have not done?"

SCB:

- This is our last reading from the letter to the Ephesians during Cycle B. During the past four weeks we have learned of the Call to Unity, Interior Renewal,

Christian Virtues, and the Chaste Life of the Children of God. This week we hear about Christian Family Life. The Apostle explores what being Christian means in the context of husband-wife relations and this is our subject for today. This teaching of Scripture has been the subject of much discussion of late; especially among the Southern Baptist Convention, which has recently adopted it as a rule of faith. Parent-child relations are addressed in 6:1-4 and are recommended reading. The supposition here is that both husband and wife are Christians (1 Peter 3:1-7 addresses the situation of a Christian wife and a pagan husband).

Gospel - John 6:60-69

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."

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."

Augustine:

- But the apostle says, and says what is true, "To be carnally-minded is death." The Lord gives us His flesh to eat, and yet to understand it according to the flesh is death; while yet He says of His flesh, that therein is eternal life. Therefore we ought not to understand the flesh carnally.
- If His disciples accounted this saying hard, what must His enemies have thought? The secret of God ought to make men eagerly attentive, not hostile.
- "This offends you;" because I said, I give you my flesh to eat, and my blood to drink, this forsooth offends you. "Then what if ye shall see the Son of man ascending where He was before?" What is this? Did He hereby solve the question that perplexed them? Did He hereby uncover the source of their offense? He did clearly, if only they understood. For they supposed that He was going to deal out His body to them; but He said that He was to ascend into heaven, of course, whole: "When ye shall see the Son of man ascending where He was before;" certainly then, at least, you will see that not in the manner you suppose does He dispense His body; certainly then, at least, you will understand that His grace is not consumed by tooth-biting.

- Then what does He mean when He says, “When ye shall see the Son of man ascending where He was before”? For there had been no question if He had spoken thus: “If ye shall see the Son of God ascending where He was before.” But since He said, “The Son of man ascending where He was before,” surely the Son of man was not in heaven before the time when He began to have a being on earth? Here, indeed, He said, “where He was before,” just as if He were not there at this time when He spoke these words. But in another place He says, “No man has ascended into heaven but He that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” He said not “was,” but, saith He, “the Son of man who is in heaven.” He was speaking on earth, and He declared Himself to be in heaven. And yet He did not speak thus: “No man hath ascended into heaven but He that came down from heaven,” the Son of God, “who is in heaven.” Whither tends it, but to make us understand that which even in the former discourse I commended to your minds, my beloved, that Christ, both God and man, is one person, not two persons, lest our faith be not a trinity, but a quaternity? Christ, therefore, is one; the Word, soul and flesh, one Christ; the Son of God and Son of man, one Christ; Son of God always, Son of man in time, yet one Christ in regard to unity of person. In heaven He was when He spoke on earth. He was Son of man in heaven in that manner in which He was Son of God on earth; Son of God on earth in the flesh which He took, Son of man in heaven in the unity of person.
- Let the Spirit be added to the flesh, as charity is added to knowledge, and it profiteth very much. For if the flesh profited nothing, the Word would not be made flesh to dwell among us. If through the flesh Christ has greatly profited us, does the flesh profit nothing? But it is by the flesh that the Spirit has done somewhat for our salvation. Flesh was a vessel; consider what it held, not what it was. The apostles were sent forth; did their flesh profit us nothing? If the apostles’ flesh profited us, could it be that the Lord’s flesh should have profited us nothing? For how should the sound of the Word come to us except by the voice of the flesh? Whence should writing come to us? All these are operations of the flesh, but only when the spirit moves it, as if it were its organ. Therefore “it is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing,” as they understood the flesh, but not so do I give my flesh to be eaten.
- What means “are spirit and life”? They are to be understood spiritually. Hast thou understood spiritually? “They are spirit and life.” Hast thou understood carnally?
- We are united by faith, quickened by understanding. Let us first adhere to Him through faith, that there may be that which may be quickened by understanding. For he who adheres not resists; he that resists believes not. And how can he that resists be quickened? He is an adversary to the ray of light by which he should be penetrated: he turns not away his eye, but shuts his mind. “There are,” then, “some who believe not.” Let them believe and open, let them open and be illumined. “For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed, and who should betray Him.” For Judas also was there. Some indeed, were offended; but he remained to watch his opportunity, not to understand. And because he

remained for that purpose, the Lord kept not silence concerning him. He described him not by name, but neither was He silent about him; that all might fear though only one should perish. But after He spoke, and distinguished those that believe from those that believe not, He clearly showed the cause why they believed not. "Therefore I said unto you," saith He, "that no man can come unto me except it were given to him of my Father." Hence to believe is also given to us; for certainly to believe is something. And if it is something great, rejoice that thou hast believed, yet be not lifted up; for "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

- "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Went back, but after Satan, not after Christ.
- For sometimes it happens that a man may declare the truth, and that what he says may not be understood, and so they that hear it are offended and go away. Now the man regrets that he had spoken that truth, and he says to himself, "I ought not to have spoken so, I ought not to have said this." Behold; it happened to the Lord: He spoke, and lost many; He remained with few. But yet He was not troubled, because He knew from the beginning who they were that believed and that believed not. If it happen to us, we are sorely perplexed. Let us find comfort in the Lord, and yet let us speak words with prudence.
- Not even Judas departed. But it was already manifest to the Lord why he remained: to us he was made manifest afterwards.
- See how Peter, by the gift of God and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, understood Him. How other than because he believed? "Thou hast the words of eternal life." For Thou hast eternal life in the ministration of Thy body and blood. "And we have believed and have known." Not have known and believed, but "believed and known." For we believed in order to know; for if we wanted to know first, and then to believe, we should not be able either to know or to believe. What have we believed and known? "That Thou art Christ, the Son of God;" that is, that Thou art that very eternal life, and that Thou givest in Thy flesh and blood only that which Thou art.
- He meant those that eat His flesh and drink His blood to be understood, from the fact of their abiding in Him and He in them; and that they understood not who believed not; and that they were offended through their understanding spiritual things in a carnal sense; and that, while these were offended and perished, the Lord was present for the consolation of the disciples who remained, for proving whom He asked, "Will ye also go away?" that the reply of their steadfastness might be known to us, for He knew that they remained with Him;—let all this, then, avail us to this end, most beloved, that we eat not the flesh and blood of Christ merely in the sacrament, as many evil men do, but that we eat and drink to the participation of the Spirit, that we abide as members in the Lord's body, to be quickened by His Spirit, and that we be not offended, even if many do now with us eat and drink the sacraments in a temporal manner, who shall in the end have eternal torments.