

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time **August 27, 2006**

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-1, 18 b Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32 John 6:60-69

Joshua's words in today's first scripture
call us up short and ask us to take a stand.

He says,

“If it does not please you to serve the LORD,
decide today whom you *will* serve...
As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Strong words these are but they have a tender place in my heart
because my mother had a framed version of that quote
next to the front door in our home.

My mother is gone as is our home, but the words still echo in my mind and heart.

Joshua's question probes deeply:

“Whom do we serve? Who is our master?”

Joshua speaks of serving false gods beyond the River
or the gods of the Amorites.

Our gods, our masters are usually less exotic and closer to home.

We serve many masters, you and I,
and they can be very powerful and demanding.

We might think of our cell phones as providing a service for us,
but how many of us are slaves to our cell phones?

We take them with us everywhere we go.

We don't leave home without them.

We respond to their every ring and vibration.

We allow them to interrupt virtually anything we're doing -
including Mass.

And of course in the same category as cell phones we find
beepers, pagers, blackberries, computers, the Internet and email.

How many of us allow our job to be our master,
allowing *it* to come before everything else?

How many of us are slaves to our work
even if, at work, we are the boss?

How strange that the higher up the employment ladder we go,
the more we are likely to be slaves to our jobs.

Money is a master many of us serve

because money is source of so many other masters:

toys, possessions, prestige, another property, leisure,
education, financial security...

How many of us are servants of our feelings?
of painful memories, anger, grudges,

disappointments, grief, bitterness, fears, anxieties?

Joshua's question about serving false gods
doesn't mean that cell phones are bad
or that hard work is wrong or that money is evil.

Joshua's question is "whom, *ultimately*, do we serve?"
Which master do we salute first?
Which master really gets our attention and affection?
Which master has first dibs on our hearts' desires?
Which master's demands become our *priorities*?
Or do we serve the Master who frees us
from being slaves to all these lesser masters?

In the gospel today Jesus speaks to those who find his words
about the eucharist too hard a saying to accept and so
"they returned to their former way of life
and no longer accompanied Jesus."

They chose another master...

Joshua and Jesus are putting the same question to us:
"Whom will you serve?
Who will accompany you on life's journey?"

Joshua decided that he and his household would serve the Lord.
Some of Jesus' disciples left him, and others stayed with him.
Here at the altar, we are literally the "companions" of Jesus.
The word companion comes from two Latin words meaning
"one with whom we break bread."

Here is the table where the household of faith gathers
to "eat the Lord's body and to drink his blood"
to "do" the "hard saying..."
to break bread with the One who allowed himself to be broken for us,
to share the cup of the One who poured out his life for us on the Cross.

Pray with me that like Joshua and his household, and the Twelve,
the household of Holy Family Parish
will continue to choose to serve the Lord.

Rev. Austin Fleming

