



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17,18b; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:32-5:1-2, 21-32; John 6:53, 60-69*]

This past week was the first in the federal election campaign. In the days leading up to the election, we shall see the various political parties roll out their policy platforms. These detail their positions on a variety of issues, and spell out what they plan to do should they be elected to office. The purpose is to help the electorate make a reasoned choice. Voters, in turn, will choose the candidates whose positions best respond to both their needs and what they feel are the most pressing issues.

As Jesus went about teaching, he laid out before the people his “platform”, if you will. In both word and deed, Jesus spelled out clearly why he had come, what he stood for, and how he would lead the people. However, Jesus was not running for office. He, the Son of God, had already been “elected”, or chosen, by his Heavenly Father to descend to earth, become incarnate, and give his life to save the world. Jesus came to the world not to be elected by us as Saviour but in order that we might choose to follow him to eternal life, the choice we call faith, based upon our response to his platform.

In the Gospel text from St. John, we hear of people making that choice. Right away we notice a radical difference between the approach of Jesus to the articulation of his platform and that of political parties to theirs. Whereas we have grown accustomed in modern-day politics to the shifting of political positions to align with opinion polls, the teaching of Jesus Christ is clearly and consistently in accord with the will of the Father. While candidates for office may say only what they think people want to hear, our Lord speaks words that he knows people need to receive, since his are the words that lead to everlasting life.

Those words are certainly not always welcome. In fact, what we hear Jesus say in the Gospel passage led to a sharp plummet in his popular standing. He states two things in particular that people found very difficult to accept. First, the need to eat his body and drink his blood if people are to have life. Second, there is no one but he who can lead us to salvation in heaven. Unable to accept this, many people leave the Lord. In fairness to them, they do not yet perceive who Jesus is and the gift of the Eucharist he would leave to the Church, realities that would become clear only after the Lord’s resurrection from the dead and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet, even before that happens, faith begins to awaken in the apostles. When Jesus asks them if they, too, would leave him, Peter goes straight to the heart of the matter with his recognition that Jesus alone is the Holy One of God, and that only Jesus therefore could speak words of eternal life. “To whom could we go,” he asks. To put it another way, Jesus is not one among a number of candidates from which we might choose to be saved from sin and death. He is the only one, designated by the Father as the unique Saviour of the world.

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What is this saying to us today? As a people of Christian faith, we recognize Jesus as the one and only Saviour. With St. Peter, we know that only obedience to his teaching and reliance upon his love and mercy lead to salvation. Yet, when his words challenge our assumptions and call us to a new way of thinking and behaving, when his commands do not sit well with us, do we stay with the Lord or walk away and look for another candidate? Do we accept only what we like to hear and try to rationalize away what we don't?

With regard to questions such as these, a sobering and salutary lesson can be learned from the ancient Israelites. In the first reading, Joshua, their leader, is speaking to them after they have come into the promised land, where there are other peoples worshipping a multiplicity of gods. Joshua is asking them to "go to the polls" and choose the god they would follow. As one, the people proclaimed they would stay with the Lord who had led them to the land he had promised. Well, they didn't. They constantly found themselves seduced by the practices of the surrounding nations and did not remain faithful to their choice.

Similar temptations afflict us as our surrounding culture grows further and further from the Gospel. Constantly do we find ourselves seduced to walk away from the Lord whom we have said we shall follow. To take as an example suggested by the passage from *Ephesians*, our secularizing world has adopted positions on marriage at clear variance from the sacrament of matrimony described by St. Paul. We know, too, that apart from the light given in Christ, our society is increasingly favouring death over life, vengeance over mercy, and indifference over love. In such a situation, the question posed by Peter becomes also real and pressing for us: To whom shall we go? Whom shall we choose to follow? The choice of faith, the decision to accept as true and necessary the platform of the Lord, requires daily ratification.

In the mass this morning, the Lord Jesus ratifies by the gift of his Body and Blood God's election of us as His beloved people. May the grace of the Eucharist renew and strengthen our choice to follow and remain with Jesus Christ, secure in the knowledge that there is no one else to whom we can go for eternal life.

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