

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

(Joshua 24, 1...18b; Ep. 5, 21-32; John 6, 60-69)
Excerpts from Father Raniero Cantalamessa - 2006
& Excerpts from Pope Francis – Angelus - 2015
by Father Charles Fillion
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Brothers and sisters, most priests would avoid speaking on the Second reading and focus only on the Gospel. Actually, we also hear in the Gospel that many found the teaching of Jesus “difficult”. So, I will start with the “difficult teaching” of the second reading, and then to connect it with the Gospel. Yes, it is true that Paul’s words with modern eyes, one immediately sees a difficulty. The recommendation to husbands that they “love” their wives is not the problem. It is the recommendation to women that they “be subject to” their husbands, and this -- in a society strongly (and justly) conscious of the equality of the sexes -- seems unacceptable.

In fact, it’s true. On this point, Saint Paul is conditioned in part by the mentality of his age. However, the solution is not in eliminating from relations between husbands and wives the word “subject”, but, perhaps, in making it mutual, as love must also be mutual. In other words, 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.

Mutual submission 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, bound together and 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 from him. But then, in the fullness of time, in Jesus 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 couple 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.

In general, the first kind of love is called “seeking love”; the second kind, “giving love”. The sign that a couple is passing from seeking to giving love, is this: Instead of saying “What more could my husband or wife do for me which he or she 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?”

Since last Sunday broke the flow of the Gospel story, here is a recap. Today, we conclude the discourse on the Bread of Life, which Jesus gave the day after the multiplication of the loaves and fish. At the end of that discourse, the great enthusiasm of the previous day had dissipated, for Jesus said that he was the Bread which came down from heaven, and that he would give his flesh as food and his blood as drink, thereby clearly alluding to the sacrifice of his life. Those words gave rise to dismay in the people, who deemed such words unworthy of the Messiah. Several regarded Jesus as a different messiah. But they were mistaken precisely in this: in the way of understanding the mission of the Messiah! Not even the disciples managed to accept the unsettling words of the Teacher. And today's passage refers to their discomfort: "This teaching is difficult".

They had certainly understood Jesus' discourse. So well, that they did not want to accept or even hear it, because it was a discourse which threw their mind-set into crisis. Jesus' words always throw us into crisis, for example, the worldly spirit, worldliness. But Jesus offers the key for overcoming this difficulty; a key consisting of three elements. First, his *divine origin*: he came down from heaven and will ascend again to "where he was before" (v. 62). Second: his words can be understood only through *the action of the Holy Spirit*. Third: the true cause of the lack of understanding of his words is the *lack of faith*. Jesus does not compromise and does not soften his words. He demands that a precise choice be made: either to stay with him or leave him.

When Peter makes his confession of faith, he does not say "where shall we go?", but "to whom shall we go?". From Peter's question we understand that fidelity to God is a question of fidelity to a person, to whom we bind ourselves to walk together on the same road. And this person is Jesus. We need Jesus, to be with him, to be nourished at his table, on his words of eternal life! He is the "Living Bread", the essential nourishment. Binding oneself to him, in a true relationship of faith and love, does not mean being tied down, but profoundly free, always on the journey. In receiving the Body of Christ, we bound together with Him in mutual love and mutual submission. We truly become a gift, a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of God's glory.