

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXI “B”
AUGUST 25/26, 2012
(Stewardship #4)

Life, as we know, involves choices. This weekend as we conclude our reading and reflection on Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of Life in the sixth chapter of St. John’s gospel, we also conclude our initial reflection on the spirituality of stewardship.

The gospel tells us that Jesus’ words were greeted by “murmuring” by many of Jesus’ listeners. This is not the first time that God’s word, divine promises and the messenger who delivers them were greeted with skepticism, “murmuring” or outright rejection. The allusion in today’s gospel is to the story of the Israelites journeying from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. In that story there are numbers of times of “murmuring”: at the edge of the Red Sea when it looks as if the pursuing Egyptians will have their revenge; when the community is without food and water in the desert; when, after having been supplied with food, the community complains about it; and several instances of carping about Moses’ leadership. Similarly, in today’s gospel the people “murmur” at Jesus and his claims. Jesus has spoken to them of the sublime gift God offers to them in him: the gift of his very own flesh and blood for food and drink. Jesus’ listeners, as the people of Moses’ day, are faced with a choice and a decision. Trust and believe in Jesus and his promises, or reject them as preposterous. Stay or go. “This saying is hard.” And indeed it is! It confronts anyone who hears it with the choice of faith—to believe in Jesus and all that relationship with Jesus implies, or to walk away.

The choice to believe to stay with Jesus requires that one “eat and drink” of him not once, but again and again. Faith is never a one-time choice never to be re-visited again. It is only through an on-going choice to “eat his flesh and drink his blood” especially in gathering with other members of the body of Christ each Sunday in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Mass, in on-going reading, study, reflection on Holy Scripture and in a personal life of prayer that relationship with Jesus can continue to be nourished. In publicly coming forward today during the rite of the Preparation of the Gifts of bread and wine which symbolize ourselves to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus in this Mass, and offering our personal commitment to daily prayer,

is the basis of keeping us in relationship with Jesus and availing ourselves of the “Bread of Life” that he offers. We choose to stay with Jesus because, like Peter, we know that there is none other to whom we would rather go.

A spirituality of stewardship founded first in an attitude of gratitude for all of God’s gifts naturally progresses to a response of faith and trust. Since everything we have is from God, it is God who is in charge of our lives, not us. This was the invitation God set before the Israelites in their desert journey at the time of Moses. This is the same invitation Jesus has offered us these last weeks when presenting himself as the “Bread of Life.” This is what we profess when, in the Lord’s Prayer at every Mass we pray **“Give us this day our daily bread”** and then publicly process to receive the transformed gifts of bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Jesus in the act of Holy Communion. This is the “rub” for us in our culture. To be invited, indeed, challenged to a spirituality and lifestyle in which we see life and personal material and spiritual possessions as gifts lent to us to be received and wisely managed, not as rights to be hoarded and guarded; gifts to be used in cooperation with God in carrying out divine purposes for the common good of all people (the Kingdom of God), especially the poor and powerless, not our own agenda, goes against our ideas of independence and cultural insistence of “personal rights” trumping all others. To value and live intimacy with God through relationship with Jesus flies in the face of being “self-made”, needing no one and no body. No wonder people “murmur” and many walk away. It’s just too much to believe; much less live.

How different would our world-view about nations and peoples, the natural environment be if seen through the lens of stewardship rather than competition, conquest, and possession? How different would my life be if I saw myself and my work as being a gift to God of cooperation in his on-going work of creation and redemption and not as a struggle to “stand my ground” while selfishly clinging to all my possessions, possessions by the way which at death we will be relieved of, like it or not. Hopefully, with Joshua in the first reading, we make our choice today echoing his words: “But as for me and my household, I will serve the Lord” (Js. 24:15).