

First Reading

Joshua 24:1-2,15-18

A reading from the book of Joshua

We will serve the Lord God, because he is our God.

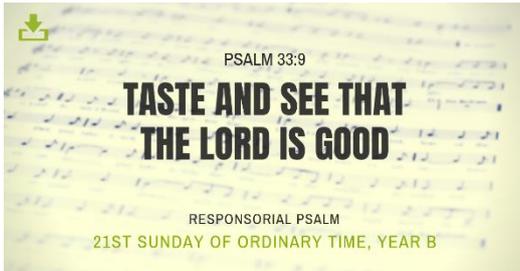
Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem; then he called the elders, leaders, judges, and scribes of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Then Joshua said to all the people: 'If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living. As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.' The people answered, 'We have no intention of deserting the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed. We too will serve the Lord, for he is our God.' The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 33:2-3, 16-23

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.



I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad.

R.

The Lord turns his face against the wicked
to destroy their remembrance from the earth.
The Lord turns his eyes to the just
and his ears to their appeal.

R.

They call and the Lord hears
and rescues them in all their distress.
The Lord is close to the broken-hearted;
those whose spirit is crushed he will save.

R.

Many are the trials of the just man
but from them all the Lord will rescue him.
He will keep guard over all his bones,
not one of his bones shall be broken.

R.

Evil brings death to the wicked;
those who hate the good are doomed.
The Lord ransoms the souls of his servants.
Those who hide in him shall not be condemned.

R.

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:21-32

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

This is the great mystery; it applies to Christ and the Church.

Give way to one another in obedience to Christ. Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church submits to Christ, so should wives submit to their husbands, in everything. Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself, she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because it is his body - and we are its living parts. For this reason, a man must leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one body. This mystery has many implications; but I am saying it applies to Christ and the Church. The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

John 6:63, 68

Alleluia, alleluia! Your words, Lord, are spirit and life: you have the words of everlasting life. Alleluia!

Gospel

John 6:60-69

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Lord, whom shall we go to? You have the words of everlasting life.

After hearing his doctrine many of the followers of Jesus said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?' 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.' 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him.' After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.' The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole of biblical religion begins with the call to listen. Each day Jewish people recite the words of the Book of Deuteronomy which Jesus echoes in the Gospel: “Listen Israel: the Lord God is our God, the Lord alone”. To listen was to be blessed and to become a blessing for others. So too each day the Christian disciple is called to listen to the words of Jesus who communicates with us as much now as he did to the disciples when he walked the earth.

Listening is harder than it sounds – in part because there’s usually so much noise within us and around us that we simply can’t hear. But another reason why listening to Jesus is hard is that he often speaks words we don’t expect or want to hear. He says some strange things which, if we were to listen and obey, would take us into some strange places. Yet the disciple who doesn’t just hear but really listens is prepared to follow wherever the Lord leads, however strange it may be.

In today’s Gospel, we hear of some who stopped following Jesus because his language became just too strange. He had been speaking of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, to which some replied, “This is intolerable language” – and you can understand why. What Jesus says about his body and blood is extraordinary language, strange by any reckoning. So they say, “Enough!” and wander off elsewhere, looking to follow another who speaks in ways less strange.

But not everyone wanders off; some stay – among them the Twelve. “Do you also want to go away?” Jesus asks them. Silence: but then Peter speaks up. “Lord, to whom can we go?” Note he doesn’t say that the words of Jesus are perfectly reasonable and acceptable; he too is baffled by what he’s heard. The language of Jesus is strange, yes, but not for Peter intolerable. He recognises that, however strange they may be, these are “the words of eternal life”. The blessing comes but in ways we don’t expect. The way home to Paradise is strange – so strange in fact that it will lead them, following Jesus, onto the dark mountain of Calvary. But the blessing will come and lead them into the light of Easter.

Faith is the name of the recognition to which Peter comes: “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God”. The Twelve have come to see the truth of who Jesus is; and only faith can reveal that truth. Once faith opens the eyes to that truth the disciples come to knowledge; they know that the words of Jesus, however strange, are utterly true and trustworthy. Therefore, they stay with him and follow him wherever he leads.

The Annual Catholic Campaign is all about listening to the words of Jesus, “the Holy One of God”, trusting what we hear and following where he leads – becoming more and more like the Master as we go, until we become so like him that people see Jesus in us. It is to be blessed and to become a blessing in turn.

The Campaign focuses on four different ways of doing what Jesus does. First, the MacKillop Fund which provides Catholic education bursaries to children of families suffering hardship, especially in this time of pandemic. Second, Holy Spirit Seminary which provides formation for our future priests who will need strong preparation for the ministry of leadership that awaits them in changing times. Third, the Priests Foundation which supports the retired, elderly and ailing priests who have spent their lives in service of God’s people and who remain a vital part of the ecology of the Archdiocese. And fourth, Centacare’s Pastoral Ministries which reach out in compassion through services like domestic violence support, psychiatric counselling, family support, hospital chaplaincy and prison ministry – all of which are facing new pressures as a result of COVID-19.

Each of these works is a powerful sign of Christ who walks with us on the way, who knows our needs and enters into our suffering, the Lord who bears our burdens and heals our wounds. So I ask you today to support the Annual Catholic Campaign in this strange landscape through which we are passing where we’re all feeling the pinch in one way or another. You may even want to consider making a regular monthly gift of an amount which means something to you. Every dollar you give will be carefully spent and will be spent for the purposes I’ve mentioned; and it will make a real difference to people who are doing it hard and need to know that the Lord Jesus is close to them.

This time of COVID-19 has made us focus on what really matters. We’ve had to work out what’s really important in the midst of all the stuff that fills our life. The Annual Catholic Campaign is one way of focusing on what really matters, which in the end means focusing on Jesus and listening to the strange and wonderful words he speaks – not just hearing but listening. His are “the words of eternal life”, the words of him who says, “Come you blessed of my Father: inherit the Kingdom prepared for you (Matt 25:34), for...as long as you did this to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40). We focus on the least in order to focus on Jesus and follow him – because “to whom else can we go?” He is the only one who can lead us home.