

**Theme: " AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSEHOLD, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD"- Joshua 24:15d**

It would be great and beautiful spiritual upliftment if every head of Christian household would make this profound profession of faith like Joshua and his household made at Shechem we just heard in the First reading. Whereas faith commitment is the main theme in the First and the Gospel readings, the second reading has Christian love as its major theme. Nevertheless, this unconditional love/Agape and faith in God are inseparable virtues for us Christians. They are both true hallmarks of an authentic Christian living.

After the death of Moses, God appointed Joshua, an army commander, to succeed Moses and to lead his people to the Promised Land. Shortly upon arrival in the Promised Land, Joshua gathered their elders, leaders, judges and officers at Shechem to make an important decision as to whom they and their households would serve and worship. He said them: "If does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling." As you have heard in the first reading, Joshua did not waste time at all to declare what he and his household would do, namely: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"- Joshua 24:15d

The leaders of Israel decided to follow the true God who liberated them from Egyptian slavery and brought them to the Promised Land. He is the true God that their ancestors worshipped and not foreign gods they will serve/worship. Like Joshua and his family, the leaders of Israel and their families would also worship Him, this true God.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus, unlike Joshua, did not coerce his disciples and apostles to decide who they would follow and serve. As you may already know that today's Gospel reading is the conclusion of Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life that we have been reading for the past several Sundays. As you would recall during this past Sunday's readings, Jesus performed many miracles : the multiplication of bread and fish with which he fed over five thousand people excluding women and children, healed the sick, calmed the storms of the Sea etc. Jesus' followers were so impressed that they wanted to make him their king.

Last week and today's Gospel readings, Jesus' disciples found it very difficult to accept or believe that he is the Bread of Life and that until they eat his flesh and drink his blood, they have no eternal life. They were shocked more so when Jesus said: "What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?." For his followers, who knew

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JOSHUA 24:15, NLT

his mother, Mary and his dad, Joseph, so what is he talking about?. They considered him merely a human being like them, and not the Son of God he claimed to be.

As many of his disciples were leaving and returning to their former ways as St. John tells us in his Gospel, Jesus then asked the Twelve: "Do you also want to leave?" Peter then made one of the most profound and the greatest professions of faith recorded in the Gospel. He said to Jesus, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

Fellow Parishioners, Peter made a personal profession of faith based on his personal experience of God. He witnessed Jesus raising the dead back to life, feeding over five thousand with only five loaves of bread and two fish, expelled demons, Jesus was raised from death, ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit upon them as promised them etc. Peter has no doubt: Jesus indeed has the words of eternal life, and he is truly the Holy One of God.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that each of us would make a personal profession of faith in Jesus like Peter. Faith handed over to you can't bear much fruits if you don't personalize it. As someone aptly says: "Secondhand faith is not an authentic faith"

Mahatma Gandhi also put it so beautifully : "A knowledge of religion, as distinguished from experience, seems but chaff in moments of trial."

In the second reading, St. Paul challenged the culture of his time that was not in accordance with the Gospel message. During his time, husband was the head of the household. All members of the family were subordinate to the husband/father. In this second reading, St. Paul advised the Ephesian Christian community and all of us that Christian marriage must be deeply rooted in mutual love and respect. This reminds me of what happened during one of my marriage preparations. I said to the lady, you must give your soon husband a fifty percent of your love and he, your soon would-be husband, must also give you a fifty percent of his love to make it one hundred percent. The lady immediately corrected me , "Fr. Ed , no please! I would give my husband one hundred percent of my love and he must also give me one hundred percent of his love." Beloved parishioners, she's right, I'm wrong. Both the wife and the husband must give one hundred percent of their love to each other. That is what St. Paul is talking about. He says, a husband must love his wife just as Christ loves the Church. If they both make this total commitment, then that would be a true Catholic marriage, an example of Holy family. Domestic violence would never be found in such a Christian family. My beloved parishioners, there can't be any meaningful Christian marriage if both the husband and the wife are unwilling to sacrifice for one another.

Again, let us always pray that like Joshua and Peter, we also would make a personal profession of faith in Jesus, the Bread of Life, no matter the storms we might or would be going through. Jesus, the good Shepherd would never abandon us. Emmanuel, God-with, is always with us.

May Holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband St. Joseph continue to intercede for us as we strive to lead a holy life. Amen!