

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (8/22-23/2009)

Joshua 24/1-2, 15-18, Psalm 34, Ephesians 5/21-32, John 60-69

Joshua, Paul and Jesus have created a hornet's nest for us in today's readings.

Each of the passages makes demands on the reader.

Joshua, back when the Israelites were ending their 40 years in the wilderness and finally getting ready to invade "the land of milk and honey", throws the gauntlet down for his people.

"Decide today whom you will serve!"

Will it be the God who has brought you thus far, or idols worth nothing?

The people respond: *"We will serve the Lord, for He is our God."*

St. Paul, operating against the culture of the time, tells his readers to be subordinate to each other, which is not a bad start.

Where he steps into quicksand is when he tells wives they should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. *"For the husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the Church... Wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything."*

Shortly thereafter, he balances the scales a little when he advises husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church... *"So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife, loves himself."*

In an age when equality between the sexes has become commonplace, at least, in principle, Paul's ideas can certainly stir up controversy.

But in the culture in which he lived, he said what he said, though he might say it quite differently were he writing today.

Jesus, in the final scene of the sixth chapter of *John*, has spoken the naked truth about who he is, bread from heaven, bread that is his body and is to be eaten, and wine that is his blood which is to be drunk.

Jewish sensibilities are challenged and some of his listeners think he is talking cannibalism!

Moreover, his claims of oneness with God do not ring true for many of those around him.

So they walk away, never to return.

Jesus makes no apologies, no compromises, but only turns to his closest disciples and asks if they too will leave.

Peter, at his best, says *"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."*

Lots of controversy in these readings. Some of it gets resolved, some of it is left out there hanging which tells you something about the Scriptures.

The Bible does not have all the answers, though it does contain most of the questions.

When we read the Scriptures, we sometimes have to struggle with God's message since it is couched in the culture, the events, the words and the personality of the writers.

And, ultimately, God's ways are not our ways!

That fact reinforces the idea that we require good, learned guides as we work our way through the Bible.

The Bible is the Word of God; the Church interprets and helps us understand that Word.

We need both.