

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
2021—B Cycle



Lord, to whom shall we go... ?”

Image source: [Believer 55](#)

Opening Prayer

(edited for use here)

Prayer of [St. Clare of Assisi](#)

from [The Early Documents](#)

I become what I love
and those whom I love
shape what I become.
I exist to become a vessel
of God’s compassionate love
for others.

So, place my mind
before the mirror of eternity!
Place my soul in the brilliance of glory!
Place my heart in the figure of the divine substance!
And transform my entire being
into the image of the Divine
through prayer.

Quoted from [Sagrada Sacred Arts](#), Oakland, CA

Scripture Readings

Joshua 24: 1-2, 15-18 “Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel. . . .”

Psalms 34: 2-3, 16-21 “I will bless the Lord at all times.”

Ephesians 5: 21-32 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church. . . .”

John 6: 60-69 “The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.”

A Reading from the Book of Joshua (24: 1-2, 15-18)

“Joshua summoned all the tribes of Israel in Shechem, and assembled the elders, leaders, judges and secretaries. And together they presented themselves before God. Addressing the people, Joshua said to them: ‘Yahweh, the God of Israel, commands me to say to you: Your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates River—Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor—serving other gods. . . . But if you do not want to serve Yahweh, make known this very day whom you shall serve—whether they be the gods your ancestors served in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites who formerly occupied the land in which you now live. As for me, I and my household will serve Yahweh.’

“The people answered: ‘May God not permit that we ever abandon Yahweh to serve other gods! For it was he who brought us and our ancestors out of Egypt, the house of slavery. It was he who did those great wonders that we have seen; he protected us on the way and through all the land where we passed, driving away before us all the nations especially the Amorites who lived in this land. So we shall also serve Yahweh: he is our God!’”

Personal Reflection

By the time this book was written, 500 years had passed since the event described. Many details about Joshua himself had been forgotten. However, a few images and memories proved sufficient to illustrate the vocation of the people of God and the meaning of their ancestors’ lives and adventures. By the time of Joshua’s death (at 110), the former pilgrims had firmly established their presence in the hills and plains of Palestine. They asserted themselves either by peaceful infiltration or, if needed, by conquest. Even more important, they were aware of their common history and destiny.

After recalling Yahweh’s marvelous interventions on behalf of Israel, Joshua invited the assembly to choose fidelity to Yahweh alone and reject any and all foreign gods. Remembrance of their solemn covenant helped the tribes to maintain fidelity to Yahweh during the dark moments that would follow Joshua’s death.

“May God not permit that we ever abandon Yahweh to serve other gods!”

— *When in my life did I make a solemn promise to God or anyone else that I later failed to honor? Why did I make that negative choice? How did it turn out for me afterwards?*

— *When in my life did I resist a temptation because I held fast to a solemn promise I had made? Why did I make that positive choice? How did it turn out?*

Responsorial Psalm 34 (2-3, 16-21)

Praise and fear of God

Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will praise Yahweh all my days;
his praise will be ever on my lips.
My soul makes its boast in Yahweh;
let the lowly hear and rejoice.
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The eyes of Yahweh are fixed on the righteous;
his ears are inclined to their cries.
But his face is set against the wicked,
to destroy their memory from the earth.
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Yahweh hears the cry of the righteous
and rescues them from all their troubles.
Yahweh is close to the brokenhearted
and saves the distraught.
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Many are the troubles of the just,
but Yahweh delivers them from all.
He keeps all their bones intact,
and none of them will be broken
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Personal Reflection

This is a song for martyrs, including the small “martyrdoms” we experience during our rough times. Our past failures, trials, and weaknesses can discourage us. The Lord always stands ready to set us free from any terrors that afflict us. We can say the same for the human weaknesses we experience in the present. At times, our own “weapons of steel” (our strengths) might turn to rust. Only in God’s hand do we find our flaming and effective sword. With God-given strength and courage within us, we will never suffer ultimate defeat.

“Many are the troubles of the just, but Yahweh delivers them from all.”

— *How strong is my faith that God is always with me, especially during the worst days of my life?*

— *Recalling a particular instance, when did God seem to “step in” and stand as a shield between me and some disastrous spiritual or physical danger? What was that temptation? How close did I come to taking a step that would have changed my life in a negative way, possibly forever? (To answer this honestly, I may need to explore some of the “skeletons in my closet.”)*

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (5: 21-32)

“Let all kinds of submission to one another, become obedience to Christ. So wives, to their husbands, as to the Lord. The husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of whom he is also the Savior. And as the church submits to Christ, so let a wife submit in everything to her husband.

“As for *you*, husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her. He washed her and made her holy by baptism in the word. As he wanted a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless, he, himself, had to prepare, and present her to himself.

“In the same way, husbands should love their wives, as they love their own bodies. He, who loves his wife, loves himself. And no one has ever hated his body; he feeds and takes care of it. That is just what Christ does for the Church, because we are members of his body.

“Scripture says: ‘Because of this, a man shall leave his father and mother, to be united with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’

“This is a very great mystery, and I refer to Christ and the Church.”

Personal Reflection

Paul's primary teaching here and elsewhere concerns the role of Christ as head of a redeemed humanity. Thus, he develops a new way for Christian married couples to understand the meaning of their union. Contrary to our own “modern” awareness, we must note that Paul places *most of his emphasis* on the role of married men. He counsels them on how to be good partners for their spouses. After making that point, he tells married men (at length) what their obligations to their wives must be.

Paul's language here offends some 21st century Christians, especially his counsel that wives be submissive to their husbands “in all things.” As a matter of fact, Paul speaks in terms of the different societal norms prevailing at *that* time. These norms gave husbands full authority in the household. When Paul says, “Let all kinds of submission become obedience to Christ,” he “baptizes” the mores of the time by asking Christian spouses to elevate their unions to the level of a covenant founded on the virtues love, fidelity, and fruitfulness.

Question: Was Paul himself a married man? There's no definitive answer in the Acts of the Apostles or in his letters. Scholars point out that Paul began his adult career as a rabidly orthodox Jewish Pharisee. In that role, he would have married and had children, as expected of a good Pharisee. If so, what happened to his wife and children? One possibility they offer is that his conversion to Christ made him anathema to all strict-observance Jews. This included his own family. But no answer to this question is conclusive.

— *If I am married or am contemplating marriage, how does my love stack up against the Christian ideals presented by St. Paul?*

— *If I am a woman who harbors a negative opinion of Paul as a misogynist, in what way might the above Scripture passage and commentary lead me to reconsider any negativity I may feel toward the former Saul of Tarsus?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to John (6: 60-69)

“After hearing (Jesus speak of eating his flesh and drinking his blood), many of his followers said, ‘This language is very hard! Who can accept it?’

“Jesus was aware that his disciples were murmuring about this, and so he said to them, ‘Does this offend you? Then how will you react when you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, not the flesh. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. But among you are some who do not believe.’

“From the beginning, Jesus knew who would betray him. So he added, ‘As I have told you, no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.’

“After this, *many* disciples withdrew and *no longer followed* him.

“Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We now believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’”

Personal Reflection

How could Jesus’ listeners believe that he, the “son of Joseph the carpenter,” had come to them directly from God? To all appearances, their lives went on as before. If they were well-to-do, they remained so, If poor, they remained so. Regardless of their status in life, Jesus offered them a new way of seeing, but that new way tested their faith as it does ours. Despite our often lukewarm response, God loves us unconditionally. In all of its twenty-plus centuries, our Church has never achieved perfection—nor will it. Yet, God uses us (we are the Church) to fulfill the divine plan of salvation and steadily prepare us for the fullness of the kingdom, here and hereafter.

“Jesus asked the Twelve, ‘Will you also go away?’” Many Catholics—even some who regularly attend Mass today—have surrendered their belief that the Eucharist is the true body and blood of the Risen Christ.

— *What are my own convictions about the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist? Is it true and real, as most of us learned early in our lives? Or is the “real presence” merely symbolic, a physical reminder of his life, death, and resurrection?*

— *After receiving the Eucharist toward the end of Mass, how long does my awareness of Christ’s presence to and within me last? Does it make it to the church doors? To the parking lot? To my home? To my life during the week to come?*

“Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go?’”

— *What would it take for me to “go away” from Jesus? A failed priest? Boring homilies? A broken relationship? Unanswered prayers? The imperfections I see in myself and my fellow Catholics, even in my own parish?*

— *If my answer is “nothing would make me give up Jesus,” what is it specifically that keeps me faithful to him?*

For Inspirational Viewing/Listening

Video:

“[Where to Go When You Cannot Go On](#)” — [Bishop Robert Barron](#) reflects on the Bread of Life (John 6)—13 min.

Music:

“[Lord, to Whom Shall We Go](#)” written by Br. Michael Herry sung by [Carolyn Arends](#)

“[Father, I Put My Life In Your Hands](#) (Psalm 31) composed and sung by [John Michael Talbot](#).

The Week Ahead

Journaling Prompts

— *Based on this weekend’s Scripture readings, what does the Risen Christ ask me to do TODAY regarding . . .*

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God’s love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

Who this week needs to hear from me some expression of love?

Who needs to receive from me a moment of laughter and personal concern?

Why do I hesitate?

In the light of this weekend’s Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Week’s Scriptures

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Book of Deuteronomy 4: 1-2, 6-8 “Now, Israel, here the statutes and decrees I am teaching you to observe.”

Psalms 15: 2-5 “Who does these things (keeps the commandments) shall never be disturbed.”

Letter of James 1: 17-18, 21-22, 27 “Religion pure and undefiled . . . is this: to care for orphans and widows and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Mark 7: 1-8 14-15-21-23 “All evils come from within and they defile.”

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Morning Prayer

One thing I ask of the Lord,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life
and behold the beauty of the Lord
and seek him in his temple.

Call: Who is it you seek?

Response: I seek the Lord my God.

Call: Do you seek him with all your heart?

Response: I do. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your soul?

Response: I do. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your mind?

Response: I do. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your strength?

Response: I do. Christ, have mercy.

Declaration of faith:

“Lord, to whom shall I go?
you alone have the words of eternal life.”
I believe and have come to know
that you are the Holy One of God.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
King of endless glory.

Source: [North Umbria Community](#), England

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

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Imprimatur:

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

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(a novel exploring “what happens next?” after we die)