

- *Master, to whom shall we go?*
 - It is a difficult time to be a Christian, let alone a Catholic.
 - The Church is often the first item in television and radio and the lead article in the newspaper. But not because she is the spotless Bride of Christ carrying on the mission of our Savior.
 - Rather, it is seemingly endless appalling, heinous actions of priests, those called to stand in for Jesus Christ, abusing children, the smallest and most vulnerable, causing unimaginable and irreparable devastation;
 - The further and even more troubling revelations that at least some church hierarchy, over an extended period of time, valued institution over the safety and protection of children, silencing many, ignoring others, fighting most, thinking of legal cases rather than the lives and health of children and their families.
 - Then, here in our own community we face the transition to a new way of being present and serving, hitting St Francis-St Mary particularly hard.
 - It is not simply about efficiency, reducing Masses so I can do it. Much, much more than that is about finding the best way to encounter Jesus Christ, sacramentally and in other ways through our community.
 - It is the very challenging task of finding new ways for the Church to be present, to reach out, to be relevant.
 - And, while I can't speak for you, I struggle with my own faith at times, in seeing how God is good even when life is not, how I can do all God asks me, how I can lead others to Him. Intellectually, I know but it is still difficult for me to feel and to be consoled by God's Presence.
 - We, too can be tempted to turn away from God, to question whether it is worth it to remain a Christian, a Catholic.
- I take great comfort in what God lays before us in our readings today, better to say how God reveals Himself again in them.

- In today's first reading Joshua asks the Israelites to make a choice.
 - “Decide today whom you will serve.” Do you want to serve the gods of the culture - or the Lord?
 - Joshua, the successor to Moses is asking the Israelites to recommit themselves to the Lord, to reinvest in the covenant the Lord has made with them.
 - They have made their way through the desert and then through the trials of battle, but they are finally entering the promised land.
 - But they are reminded that God has done, delivered on what was promised: led them out of slavery, through the Red Sea as if on dry land, through the desert, feeding them and watering them the whole time.
 - *“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*
- In our second reading another choice is called for as Paul asks husbands and wives to make a choice.
 - Paul offers a new dignity to marriage: *Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.*
 - Christ is to be the example and exemplar for all people but especially those called to marriage. Love one another, treat one another as Christ loved and treated the Church. Christ sacrificed all for the Church, giving His life on the Cross.
 - This is to be the measure of marriage. This is the choice to make. Nothing less is acceptable.
 - And in making this choice one for the other, husband and wife demonstrate in the sacred bond of marriage not domination or power over the other but service, dedication, gentleness, making Christ and the Church radically and profoundly present.
 - *As for me and my household we will serve the LORD.*

- And Jesus asks His disciples to make a choice as well.
 - It's the conclusion of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, often called the Bread of Life Discourse that we have been hearing these last few weeks. Remember, Jesus fed the huge crowd with bread and fish and revealed His divine identity as I AM by showing power over the sea, the waves and the storm.
 - Teaching now in the synagogue at Capernaum Jesus revealed Himself not only as the provider of the bread, but also as the Bread Himself, nourishing His disciples both in His teaching and in the Eucharist.
 - Now upon completion of His teaching, many followers murmured, "This ... is hard; who can accept it?" and many of his disciples left him.
 - So you can imagine the pain as Jesus watches them go.
 - It's not just rejection of Him, but the pain and sadness of knowing that those who leave are missing out on God's love and mercy.
 - They are choosing the comfort and the security of their beliefs over the radical Love of the omniscient, omnipotent God who humbled Himself to take on our human form and stands right there before them.
 - Painful as it is, Jesus does not change His stance or water down the truth. He respects their choice, their free will to turn away, and is prepared to proclaim God's love alone if He has to.
- But He doesn't want to and so Jesus turns to the Twelve, "Are you going to leave me as well?"
 - Jesus is asking them to choose. The choice is not about teaching or doctrine or creed but about Christ Himself and being present with Christ, remaining with Him. Here, there's no room for waffling hiding behind the crowd or settling for choosing only the easy parts of the relationship with Jesus.

- Inspired by the Holy Spirit, even in the pain and confusion of the moment, worried as he is about the future, aware as he is of his own sinfulness, struggling as he will to respond with more than mere bravado, you can almost imagine the timidity of Peter's voice: *“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.”*

- And now, this morning, like the Israelites, like the people Paul was writing to in Ephesus, or like Peter and the other Apostles, God calls each of us to choose, to reconnect ourselves to Christ and recommit ourselves to the covenant God made with us through Jesus.
 - Christ respects our freedom too much to force us to choose Him; like those in today's Gospel we can leave, recognizing how hard it is to do what God asks. It's a very challenging and difficult decision because it is not just a choice made only in theory or with mere lip service.
 - We can only truly choose Jesus Christ by offering our hearts, offering **all** of our selves, everything we are, and do and have.
 - Even and especially in these difficult times, we are called to choose, not doctrine or institution but for Christ Himself.

- And, thanks be to God, we do not make the choice in a vacuum.
 - Like the Israelites we choose a God who has Made Himself known to us, who has chosen us to be His, who looks out for and seeks always to protect us, calling us to trust even in the desert, even when what has been promised seems impossible.
 - Like those in Ephesus we choose a God who has sacrificed Himself for us, humbly taking on our human form, willing to suffer and die that we might never be separated from Him.

- And like those disciples, we see a God who provides for us, who offers us not just the basics we need but feeds us with His own Body and Blood, that we may be intimately connected and even share in the Divine Life, that we may enjoy eternity with God.
- We are chosen and called by the God who loves us, who seeks only to be close to us. In that closeness, God asks us now to make a choice, to choose Him and to offer our lives to Him.
- It's a choice that goes beyond the institutional church, certainly beyond the human sinfulness of any and all who serve the Church. It's a choice that goes beyond difficult moments as it is precisely in those difficult moments that the God we choose offers us hope.
- It is the hope we have for the Church, a time beyond the scandal and the horror of abuse, where the laity not only look for but DEMAND full accountability for all, especially from our bishops.
- It is the hope we have for our own community that coming together as a pastorate , we can discern God's will for us as a community and learn how we can be present to one another and to those in the larger community around us.
- It is the hope we see in our becoming disciples and then our focusing on sharing the Good News and making disciples. It is the hope we see in our young people actively serving as members of the community even as this Mass.
- It is the hope that comes in our new formation program, of seeking to connect better our children and young people to Jesus Christ.
- It is the hope seen in our joint celebration of the Knights of Columbus councils of both parishes to install new officers and work together.

- And it is the hope seen in the baptism of a child, the fullness of the future laying before that child and the family, not merely in the number of years, but even more in the love of God who draws this child to Himself and in our pledge, which we will make again in just a minute, to assist the parents and godparents in forming this child through our prayer, example and service.
- It is this hope that allows us not only to weather the tough times but to move ahead, to share the presence of God with others even in those tough times.
- *“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.”*