

FIDES PETRI

A Homily for the Twenty-first Sunday of the Year (B)

St Augustine's Parish, London.

Texts: Josh. 24: 1-2; 15-18; Ps. 32; Eph. 5:21-32; John 6:60-69.

The faith of Peter, the leader of the Apostles, in the Lord Jesus who is the Bread of Life, is the same faith that the Church of Christ holds and teaches. We have all heard in the Gospel Reading of today what happened concerning the Lord's teaching on the importance and centrality of the Holy Eucharist in the life of individual Christians and the Church as a family. We have been reading in the past Sundays about this most important teaching. The Lord has insistently taught the disciples that he is the Bread of Life which has come down from heaven. As we have just heard, some of the people stopped following him. For them, the doctrine is intolerable, unacceptable. This is significant. These people who went away were not among the people who came occasionally to listen to him out of curiosity or to have their diseases cured. Rather, they were members of his group. They were among his disciples.

We know very well that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who would leave ninety-nine sheep to look for one that has gone astray. He is the One who has *come to seek out and to save that which was lost*. He is that Shepherd who took pity on the people because *they were harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd*. Why then did he let these people go away and stop being his disciples? This he did to teach us the importance of his

doctrine on the Eucharist. This explains why instead of asking the disciples not to go away, he asked the Twelve if they, too, would like to go away. He was prepared to raise a new group of Apostles rather than change his doctrine on the Eucharist.

Peter's profession of faith here is similar to that which we read in the Gospel according to St Matthew. In this profession, Peter, speaking on behalf of the other Apostles made a clear choice between following Jesus, who is really, truly and substantially present in his body and blood – the Eucharist, and leaving. Peter's profession is foreshadowed by the faithful profession of faith in Yahweh by the prophets and leaders of Israel. Today we hear the successor of Moses, Joshua. Here is a good man and a good leader whose temperament and style are different from those of Moses. As a servant of Moses he was aware of the suffering of his master who bore the brunt of the people's repeated infidelity and ceaseless complain. He told the people simply that following the Lord was a choice. One had to choose to follow the true God or the false gods. He and family had already chosen to serve the true God.

All of us here present have made the choice to follow the true God, to be faithful disciples of Christ. Before we were baptised we were asked to choose between the living God and the Devil: to reject Satan and believe in the Holy Trinity. We were further asked to believe in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. By answering "Yes I do" we chose to believe in the true God like Joshua and to believe in Jesus Christ, the One who has the message of eternal life, like Peter and the other Apostles.

This choice is renewed every time we take a new step in our journey of faith. This is the choice which we must affirm in our life-long commitment to serve the Lord as Catholics. The Second Reading of today presents a

challenge before us – a challenge that is an issue of great importance. It is a choice about marriage - the Sacrament of Matrimony. As I look around I am filled with great joy as I see those who made the choice to understand marriage as a holy institution and therefore to live out their marital covenant in accordance with the doctrine of Christ and his Church. These are the men and women I see who have celebrated many anniversaries of their fidelity to each other and to Christ. But I also know that there are people, even people who are baptised who are arguing that the Church’s teaching on marriage is old fashioned and should be discarded.

I appeal to you all in the name of the Lord to know that we should never be misled by the opinions of non-believers or those who serve the false gods. Even when people attempt to mislead us in the guise of “ecumenism”, we must remember that we stand with Peter. True ecumenism is an honest search for unity based on the truth, that is, Christ and his doctrines. It is not a relationship built on the foundation of pretence or compromise or even on the search for popularity. It does not pretend that there are no real differences between the Catholic Church and other churches. As Fr John Bertolucci says, “***True ecumenism does not deny the differences. It does not whitewash the differences...***” The Holy Eucharist is “***the source and summit***” of the life of the Church. It is from the Eucharist that the Church draws its life. It is a truth we cannot compromise.

The faith of Peter is the faith of the Church. For where Peter is there is the Church. The successor of Peter is Pope Benedict XVI. And where he stands, there I stand. There you stand. There the Church stands.

Fr Damian O. Eze, MSP
London, 23 August, 2009.