

August 22, 2021

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Ps 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

Eph 5:21-32 or 5:2, 25-32

Jn 6:60-69

CHOOSING HIM AT ALL TIMES!

Last June 8th episode of the **America's Got Talent**, there was an amazing singer named **Jane Marczewski**, known as **Nightbirdie**, who sang her own composition entitled, "**It's okay!**" She got the golden buzzer. But, more than the golden buzzer, people loved her because she exuded hope and strength in spite of what she was going through. She was just 30 years old battling cancer, abandoned by her husband, and yet she chose to be positive in her outlook in life. Many times, she admitted that she got her strength and positive attitude from her intimate relationship with God. Her words that touched millions of viewers were: "**You can't wait until life isn't hard anymore to decide to be happy.**" "**I have a 2% chance of survival, but 2% is not zero percent. 2% is something, and I wish people knew how amazing it is.**"

Last week, **Nightbirdie** made a virtual appearance on the show to withdraw from it because her cancer has taken a turn for the worse. One of the things she said was, "**It's not easy being friends with people and friendship with God is no different. Life is complicated and friendship with God does not make life less complicated. But as I get older, I am realizing that I would not have it any other way.**"

Her story tells us that she made a choice. She chose to hold on to her faith in God rather than give it up. She chose to be better rather than bitter in spite of her worsening health conditions. She chose to be happy and hopeful rather than sad and hopeless. She was able to choose the higher ground because she was deeply rooted in her relationship with God.

I started with her story, emphasizing her choice, because the Word of God proclaimed to us today speaks of making a choice.

- In our **1st reading from Book of Joshua**, we heard how Joshua challenged the Israelites to decide. He said to them, "**Decide today whom you will**

serve..." They had a choice either to serve the Lord or the gods of their fathers. The people decided to follow the lead of Joshua by saying: **"We also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."**

- In our **2nd reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians**, we heard St. Paul encouraging the people of Ephesus to choose to love like Christ. In the context of married life, St. Paul was calling husbands and wives to live their relationship in mutual love and respect. He was calling them to treat each other with dignity just as Christ treats his Body, the Church.
- In our gospel proclaimed, after hearing the reaction of his disciples who said: **"This saying is hard; who can accept it?"** the Lord Jesus asked them, **"Do you also want to leave?"** The Lord Jesus was giving his disciples the freedom to choose - either to stay with him or away from him. He was not forcing them to embrace his teachings. They were free to go against it. The choice was theirs. Simon Peter, speaking on behalf of the group, answered the Lord Jesus by saying: **"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."** They chose to stay with the Lord Jesus and tried their best to live that decision.

In every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the Lord Jesus confronts us with a choice either to be active or passive participants of his banquet. We have a choice either to listen his Word proclaimed or ignore it by playing our smartphones during the Mass. We have a choice either to allow him to form and transform us or reject the invitation to change. We have a choice to make. We hope and pray that our choice will always be to stand for the Lord Jesus every day. Like the words of Simon Peter, we will always tell the Lord Jesus: **"Lord, 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."**

We do know that to be real Catholic Christians in works and words is not easy. It is very challenging. The possibility of facing criticism, ridicule, and even social isolation for standing for Christ is not remote. Hence, in this Mass, we ask the Lord Jesus to give us the grace to be courageous and strong in choosing Him so we can give witness to the faith in the world like **Nightbirdie**.

God bless us all!