

Rev. Ray Pothireddy

21st Ordinary Sunday Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Eph 5:21-32; Jn 6:60-69

For the first time in my life, I spend last Friday as total sleepless night. I tried to force myself to sleep, but could not. It all started after reading the pastoral letter sent by our bishop on the last Sunday. As I started to prepare my homily for this weekend, as I started reflecting the recent developments in Pennsylvania, my heart broke and it caused me to have sleepless night.

As I was forcing myself to sleep, two events flashed inform of me. The first event took place on April 6, 1994 evening. In the presence of 115 priests, equal number of religious nuns and more than 2,000 faithful, my bishop laid his hands on me and anointed my hands with Holy Chrism. At that very moment, I heard the message; 'I called you to be mine, to work as good shepherd after my heart to take care, to lead, to feed, to protect and above all to dye if necessary for my sheep. Never become a servant to steel and never turn to be a wolf to devour my sheep.

The second event turned out to be a series of event which took place on the Holy Thursday evening – starting with the last supper, washing the feet, ordaining the apostles, giving the new commandment, establishing the Holy Eucharist. I moved on to the agony in the garden. As I started reflecting on the agony of our Lord, without my notice, tears started rolling from my eyes. The agony of our Lord, the suffering of the Church now caused me to spend the entire night without sleep.

Now here I am in front of you to share my reflecting – reflection either to be with him or to be away from him; either to remain totally for him or to turn against him. We all are called to make a choice.

Malcolm Muggeridge accompanied a film crew to India in order to narrate a documentary on Blessed Mother Teresa. He already knew she was a good woman or he wouldn't have bothered going. When he met her, he found a good woman who was also so very compelling that he titled his documentary, *Something Beautiful for God*. When he asked Mother Teresa why she went to Mass every day at 4:30 AM she replied, "If I didn't meet my Master every day, I'd be doing no more than social work." (Victor Shepherd, Dec 2001.) **We are** here today to meet Christ and, not for some other reason. We are here to listen for Christ's word for our life. We'll find what John, Simon Peter, St. Augustine and Mother Teresa found: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*"

The main theme of today's readings is that Christian life is a series of daily choices for God or against God. The fundamental choice we make determines how we live our lives. **Joshua**, in the first reading, and **Paul**, in the second reading, make similar challenges to the people to make their choice. Today we, too, are challenged to decide whom we will serve.

Joshua challenges the Israelites to decide whom they will serve the gods of the Amorites or the God of Israelites Who has done so much for them. **Paul**, in the second reading, emphasizes the unity that must exist in the Body of Christ, and the intimate relationship between Jesus and His followers. It also challenges us to build Christian marriages on mutual respect and love.

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges his Jewish audience, to make their choice of accepting the New Covenant he offers in his Body and Blood.

A tough teaching without compromise: His own disciples complained by saying, "*This teaching is difficult. Who can accept it?*" They were offended by Jesus' language -- his imagery -- the metaphors he used in his Eucharistic discourse. Jesus tries to help his followers to make a leap of Faith, because it is only with Faith that they will be able to see and grasp the triple mystery which has been revealed to them, namely, **(1)** the Incarnation; **(2)** the Redemption; **(3)** the Ascension and glorification.

This is an invitation to accept the "scandal of the cross." St. Paul, speaks of "the offense of the cross". He says in *1 Cor.1:18*, "*The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing*".

Today we reflect on heaviness of the cross. Not the cross which Jesus carried and asking us to carry. This is the heavy cross which is prepared by some of our brothers in different parts of the world, particularly in the diocese of Pennsylvania. We, the Church are facing so many problems, problems from with-in and with-out. Last Sunday when we read the pastoral letter from our bishop, almost all of us shocked, felt the heaviness of the cross.

The Church is made up of saints and sinners... From the very beginning there appeared so many *Judas Iscariots* who sided the opponent, who tried to ruin the Church by their evil acts. Because of some individuals and their activities – they may be popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, and faithful, the Church is suffering and Christ is still bleeding.

We all know that these incidents are taking place in all the religions, in all the sections of the world. But by saying this we cannot justify our acts. We are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. That becomes possible only when we surpass all the others in our character, in our behavior and in our life.

Last one week I was sleeping on this. As I was reflecting more and more, the incident in the life of *Pope John XXIII* came into my mind. He was worried about the troubles in the church – Jesus said, "John, stop worrying. Do what is needed of you. You are not the head of the church, it is I; I know how to take care of my church..." I got some consolation after this. Yes... this is His Church.

He is our head... we all are his body... This St. Catherine is our family... We must join our hands to strengthen our family. We must make every effort to protect the children and the vulnerable.

Here I would like to take the words of Ralph Martin about the Current Crisis -

How can we passively endure such corruption that runs so wide and deep? It is right to make our views known. It is right and necessary. But even more so, it is necessary to pray and offer sacrifices for the Church and her leaders at this time. It is necessary to pray that genuine reform, rooted in real repentance and an embrace of all the truths of the faith, would come out of this awful situation and that the Church, more deeply purified and humbled, may shine forth with the radiance of the face of Christ.

But it is going to be a long way from here to there. Grave damage has been done to the credibility of the Church, and more will leave. Grave damage has been done to many of the flock, and reparation must be made; public repentance is called for. As *Pope Benedict XVI* wrote when he was a young priest, **the Church will have to become smaller and more purified before it can again be a light to the world.** The Church is going through a radical purification under the chastising hand of

God, but already we can see a remnant of fervent renewal appearing all over the world, which is a sign indeed of hope and the renewal to come.

And so, what can we do as we continue to pray for the pope and our leaders that God may give them the wisdom and courage to deal with the root of the rot and bring about a real renewal of holiness and evangelization in the Church?

»We need to go about our daily lives, trying to live each day in a way pleasing to God, loving Him and loving our neighbor, including the neighbor in our own families. We need to look to ourselves, lest we fall.

»We need to remember that even though we have this treasure in earthen vessels (or as some translations put it, “cracked pots”), the treasure is no less the treasure. Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater! Baby Jesus is the treasure, and He is still as present as ever and still as ready to receive all who come to Him. And the Mass! Every day, He is willing to come to us in such a special way. Let’s attend daily Mass even more frequently, to offer the sacrifice of Jesus’ death and resurrection to God the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of souls and the purification of the Church.

»We need to remember that the Catholic Church is indeed founded by Christ and, despite all problems, has within it the fullness of the means of salvation. Where else can we go? Nowhere; this is indeed our Mother and Home, and she needs our love, our prayers, and our persevering in the way of holiness more than ever.

»We need to remember that there are many truly holy and dedicated bishops and priests, and we must pray for them and support them. They need and deserve our support.

»We need to remember that this isn’t the first time such grave problems have beset the Church. In the fourteenth century, *St. Catherine of Siena* bemoaned the “stench of sin” coming from the papal court and prophesied that even the demons were disgusted by the homosexual activity he had tempted priests into and the cover up by their superiors! (See chapters 124-125 of Catherine of Siena’s *The Dialogue*.)

That isn’t to say that we don’t need to take seriously and do all we can in response to the grave scandal we are facing in our time. And yet we need to remember that all this is happening under the providence of God, and He has a plan to bring good out of it. It was even prophesied strongly in Mary’s apparitions in Akita, Japan. Jesus is still Lord and will use the current grave problems to bring about good.

And finally, the urgent need to heed the appeals of Our Lady of Fatima is the weapon of the hour. Indeed, as Mary said, ***“Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.”***

Let’s continue to pray and offer sacrifices for the conversion of sinners and as reparation for sin, and let’s pray the rosary daily as Mary requested, for peace in the world and true renewal in the Church.

Until then let us carry this heavy cross while spread His message of love, mercy, forgiveness to all.