

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary time
August 26, 2018
By Deacon Nick Thompson

Joshua was a young man when Moses sent him as a scout into the promised land the first time. His parents had told him the story of slavery in Egypt and freedom through the Red Sea as they wandered the desert of Sin for 40 years. He remembers that a lack of faith in God on the part of 10 of the 12 scouts led to another 40 years at Shechem. He would not be party to another lack of faith in the God of his fathers. He and his family would enter the promised land and serve the Lord. The Israelites of this new generation had also heard the stories, heard the eye witness accounts of their parents and grandparents, leaders and judges. They were faced once again with the ancient quandary of mankind: To trust in only what we can see or to trust in God. To trust in the spiritual which cannot be seen, or to trust in the physical which our eyes can focus on. This time they too decide, "We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God." They overcome the fear of losing what they have, they surrender earthly possessions. They abandon their lives their homes in Shechem and are led by faith and hope into the unknown promised land.

My young nephew, very early twenties, sat in the kitchen of his grandmother and asked, "Considering how unpredictable human beings

are from one moment to the next, how can anyone ever ask someone to Marry them. The outcome just seems inevitable. And yet there are people who make it work. How can you know when you have found the right person?" My answer, get God involved from the beginning, from the very first time you say hello. From the beginning make the other persons happiness your priority, respect them and God's law so that you have no guilt or regrets when you part. When it is the right person God will let you know not through your senses, your fleshly desires but through the emptiness of your heart as they depart then it is a matter of faith that God will make your two hearts one. Trust that despite our unpredictability God can make two people into the image of Christ and his church. After all, God can even make bread become his own flesh. Love begins in having the faith to overcome the fear of losing yourself, fear of surrendering your heart.

Jesus' disciples are presented the ancient quandary, to trust in only what we can see or to trust in Jesus. To trust in the spiritual which cannot be seen, or to trust in the physical which our eyes can focus on. They loved hearing the words of the Lord. They loved experiencing the warmth of His presence. They had just eaten bread He multiplied. They had seen him heal people. They had heard about His Kingdom. What was even better, they had heard Him call them to be leaders in His Kingdom. But

now Jesus had given them a teaching that demanded their absolute trust in Him, their absolute faith in Him, even though this teaching was completely against what their eyes, ears and senses were telling them. He told them that He was the Bread of Life. He told them that they needed to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood for them to have eternal life.

For some of the disciples, this was too hard to accept. They were convinced that the true God, the creator, would not make such outlandish demands on their senses. They left Jesus and returned to their previous lives. The Twelve reported to Jesus what was happening. Perhaps they were implying that Jesus tone down His teaching some. Maybe they were just pointing out that the Lord was losing followers. Whatever. The fact is that Jesus was not going to take back 'The Word.' He came to make the spiritual real. He came to bring a reality to the world that was beyond the capacity of man to understand. He came to bring the Gifts of God that were far greater than man's fondest hopes. He would not compromise the truth. "Will you go, also, Peter," he asks the leader of his Twelve. "Lord, where can we go, you alone have the words of eternal life." And with that confession of faith, Peter stays surrendering himself to hope and faith in the living Word. He did not know through his senses how it was possible for Jesus

to give His Body and Blood as the food they would need for the journey to God. Peter did not know with his senses, but he knew with his heart that all was beautiful with Jesus and that it would be infinitely foolish to trust in the senses rather than trust in the Lord.

And Jesus said in today's gospel, "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is to no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." We are called to believe in the Lord, to trust in Him. We are called to stay on faith rather than to trust in our own ability to make sense of the world. We are called to give an infinitely greater credence to the spiritual we cannot see over the material we can see. We are called to overcome fear and surrender to faith.

It is quite normal for us to go through periods of doubting the teachings of the Lord. It is normal for us to ask, "How is God only one, if the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God?" It is quite normal for us to ask: "How can Jesus be both fully God and fully man?" It is quite normal for us to ask: "How can this bread and wine, material objects before the Mass, now be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?" It is quite normal for us to want to stand on the material world of our senses and ignore the new world of the spiritual.

When these types of doubts come to our mind, be they flashing through, or lingering and challenging us, we need to stop and consider the Gifts of the Lord. We need to reflect on our Savior, Jesus Christ. We reflect on the wonders He provides that are beyond our imagination, too good to be true, but, yes, they are true. We are children of God. We think about the peace that we have when we are united with Him and the chaos we have when we turn from Him. And, so, we trust completely in the Lord. We trust Him over our own senses. We trust that faith is infinitely better than standing on the material ground of physical senses. For what else can we do? Where else can we go? He alone has the words of eternal life.

And so, we believe. We believe in that which we do not see. We believe in that which our human senses cannot reveal. We believe in the Lord, in His Love, and in His teaching. We believe that God exists for eternity in a Trinity of Persons. We believe that the Second Person of this Trinity became man to restore the spiritual to the physical, to restore man to his rightful place in the spiritual world, and we believe He gave us His Body and Blood, the Eucharist, as both an intimate sharing in His Presence and a union of all believers into the eternal swell of His love.

We are human, yes, but we have been entrusted with the mystery of the Divine. We have been given the Gift of the Eucharist. Accepting by faith is infinitely superior to clasp the deadly limitations of life without God, the limitations of the physical. When we embrace faith, we experience deeper and deeper revelations of God's Love. Sure, we are tempted to trust only our senses. We are tempted to stand on the material. We are tempted to limit ourselves to the here and now. We are human. But we are also spiritual. We can cry out in prayer, Lord give us the hearts we need to overcome our fear of surrendering to faith. And deep within us, deep within every single one of us there is the Word of God prodding us to exclaim with Peter, "I will not leave you Lord. You alone have the words of eternal life."