

John 6:56-69

Jesus proclaims that he is the bread that came down from heaven, and that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will remain in Christ and Christ in them. Then many disciples grumble and even start leaving, but when Jesus asks the twelve if they want to go too, Peter answers that they have nowhere else to go, because Jesus has the words of eternal life.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”

But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.”

For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Readings 53B

John van de Laar, Sacredise: This week is all about choices - the choice to turn our lives to God or abandon our devotion to God and God’s ways. In the Gospel, many of Jesus’ followers find his call to be completely united with him - to believe that he is the source of life and to take him into their beings (eating his flesh and drinking his blood) - too much to handle and they abandon Jesus. But, his disciples, although they may be feeling like they want to go, recognise that life is found in Christ and so remain faithful. Linked with our choice to follow Jesus there is a call to prayer. In the famous passage from Ephesians, Paul calls the believers to prepare for the attacks of evil by putting on God’s armour (making a choice to stay faithful), and he calls them to prayer for themselves and for him as he seeks to spread the Gospel. In the Old Testament semi-continuous reading, Solomon prays and pleads with God to hear and answer the prayers of all who pray toward the Temple. The theme this week is simple and clear: everyday we will be faced with the choice to remain faithful to Christ or to turn away, and we will need the intimacy with God that comes through prayer and through sharing in the life of Christ to remain true to our calling. In a world where religion is being questioned and falling out of fashion, and in which many parts of the Church are in decline, this choice, and the call to prayer, are as important as ever.

As we listen for what God may be saying to us this week in terms of the global issues of our time, the readings draw our attention to three important calls. The first is to remember that we always face the choice to remain faithful to God or to abandon God’s ways. We can work for justice in God’s name, but fall to the temptation to adopt the strategies of evil, believing that the end justifies the means, or we can stay committed to the ways of integrity, transparency and ethical operations. We can continue to trust in and strive for the ideal of God’s Reign, or we can choose expediency and embrace whatever compromises get the job done, at least in part. The call to stay faithful speaks strongly through the readings this week. The second call is to recognise that it is the evil in human hearts, human structures, institutions and systems that opposes God’s Reign of justice, peace, compassion and love. As such, we are called to resist the evil, while still maintaining an attitude of grace and compassion toward the people we must confront or who oppose what we do. Finally, there is the call to make prayer a significant part of our strategy as we work to manifest God’s Reign in our world. Ultimately, we need prayer for its ability to empower us, and for the way it changes us to conform more and more to the ideals of God’s Reign for which we strive.

Psalm 84: *A Psalm in praise of God's Temple,*

A psalm telling of the joys of dwelling in God's House, and of God's strengthening of God's people. Also a request for God to hear the Psalmist's prayer.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

Selah. Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; God bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

The Ark of the Covenant is placed in Solomon's newly built temple. The cloud of God's glory fills the temple. Solomon prays that God will keep God's promise to have a descendent of David on the throne forever, and for God to hear and answer the prayers of God's people and immigrants when they pray in the temple.

Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name - for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm - when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

Ephesians 6:10-20

The apostle encourages believers to recognise that their struggle is not against human beings, but against spiritual forces of evil. In order to stay strong they need to put on God's armour and remain faithful in prayer. He also asks them to pray for him.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.