

21 Sunday B

August 26, 2018

St. Patrick

Theme: Jesus ever gives us a choice to decide on our deepest longing.

“Decide today whom you will serve,” Joshua calls the chosen people to make a clear choice. **“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”**

Making a choice. It’s startling, disturbing, that at this point in Jesus’ ministry **“many of his disciples”**—not a few, but **“many”**—gave up on him and no longer **“walked with him.”** Jesus had been teaching that *he* is the Bread of Life, and all that stuff became too much for a lot of them.

And, you know, Jesus never left any of them a voicemail with this message: “Hey, I haven’t seen you lately. How about if I dropped by and talked things over? We need you.” Jesus never texted them with a sad-faced emoji, inviting folks to reconsider and rejoin him.

Many gave up on Jesus. And, we all know what that thing in the middle of our washing machine is called—the agitator. Jesus then even agitates the Twelve, daring them as well: **“Do you also want to leave?”**

St. Patrick’s: These days, there are a lot of us who are angry within the Church, and some are understandably wrestling with whether to remain a member. Other folks aren’t satisfied on how God seems to be acting in their lives. There are plenty of reasons to walk away...sometimes, it’s an abrupt break (“I’ve had enough; this is it!”); other times, gradually coming less and less, drifting away.

In today’s Gospel, *many* gave up on Jesus, and he gave them the freedom to walk away.

The Jesuit spiritual writer from India, Anthony De Mello, who died in 1987, once told this story, this parable:

**A sheep found a hole in the fence
and crept through it.
He wandered far
and lost his way back.**

**Then he realized that he was
being followed by a wolf. He ran
and ran, but the wolf kept chasing
him, until the shepherd came
and rescued him and carried him
lovingly back to the fold.**

**In spite of everyone's urgings
to the contrary, the shepherd refused
to nail up the hole in the fence.**

Many gave up **“walking with”** Jesus. And *this* Good Shepherd refuses to nail up the hole in the fence. Jesus ever gives us the choice.

“Do you also want to leave?”—still agitating, Jesus asks *us* the question.

Simon Peter made his choice: **“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life...and we are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”**

“To whom shall we go?” Yes, Friends, it's always a person, not a doctrine, or creed which will keep us within the communion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells it clearly, **“No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”** Before it ever becomes my choice, it is the Lord who first gazes lovingly on me, chooses me, and invites me to be his disciple. The same with you: Jesus first gazes lovingly on *you*, chooses *you*, and invites *you* to walk with him.

Yes, we're called to make a choice about this Jesus.

For five Sundays we've heard from chapter six of St. John's Gospel about Jesus as our “Bread of Life.” It started, you remember, with that miracle—that marvelous multiplication—and way more than 5000 wanted to make Jesus their king.

Today, at the chapter's end, "**many**"—not some—started looking elsewhere.

St. Patrick's: The Good Shepherd refuses to nail up the hole in the fence. He gives us the choice. And, strangely, it is *this* Good Shepherd who places himself as a simple piece of broken bread into the hands of those whose spirit groans, aches, for a deeper meaning (1).

(1) See Michael Simone, S.J., "The True Bread," in America (August 20, 2018), pg. 50.

General Intercessions

August 26, 2018

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Grace us, your church, that we might choose to accompany Jesus in a daily discipleship; we pray to you, O Lord—

Instill courage, wisdom and love within Pope Francis during this weekend's pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Ireland; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give healing to all who have been abused; be with perpetrators and church leaders who have “covered up” these crimes; and give hope to your church; we pray to you, O Lord—

Help us to secure immigration policies that reflect your compassion and justice; we pray to you, O Lord—

Embolden young adults to live creatively their discipleship in the workplace, their homes, and the world; we pray to you, O Lord—

Strengthen and support all those who seek help or are in treatment for drug or alcohol addiction; we pray to you, O Lord—

Fulfill the desire for eternal life in all who have died with hope, especially Harold Meyer; we pray to you, O Lord—

