



From the Office of the President

John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.
REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Homily for the Twenty-first Sunday of the Year (B)
St. Joseph's Parish, Denver, CO
August 25, 2018**

**Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b
Psalm 34
Ephesians 5:21-32
John 6:60-69**

“If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve... As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24). And hearing Joshua, the People Israel declared that they would serve the LORD, not foreign gods.

It was the right answer, of course. But that doesn't mean the challenges of faith and faithfulness were finished. Quite the contrary. “Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.” “Deference and reverence, first of all, are not prominent nouns in our contemporary lexicon of privileged words” (Kavanaugh, *The Word Encountered*, 96-97).

To us and to many in the world, submission or subordination of any kind is shameful, benighted, even pathological. In any intimate relationship, we long for balance and equality. But when there is imbalance, when a person becomes a doormat we react physically:

- When we see it, especially in physical form, we cringe.
- When we hear it, it raises the alarm like a screeching tire.
- When we taste it, it's sour.
- When we smell it, it's rancid.
- And when we feel it, it's like an abrasion on an open wound.

Now, my parents didn't raise dumb kids but this is going to be a dive into the deep end of the pool!

The author of the Letter to the Ephesians pens what are called *haustaflen*, or household rules, very common in the ancient world. The Christians got them from Hellenistic Judaism and Judaism got them from the Stoics. Our reaction is natural enough; after all, “Why should any of us have to submit to another or put someone else first? What is worse, Paul seems to commend obedience only to the women...What about the men?” (Kavanaugh, 97).



There is a difference in these house-hold rules though, a difference often overlooked to our peril. “Marriage in Paul’s day was a business arrangement between the parents. How could it help a family to make a marriage match? How many sheep would she bring to the family? Does his family have a lot of land? The idea of marrying for love is, for the most part a concept from the last 200 years” (Maureen Waldron, “Daily Reflection,” 8-25-18, Creighton University). Oh, love was longed for and sometimes people grew into it. It was however a secondary consideration.

While there are many suggestions of male dominance in Paul’s writing, especially in the analogy of the husband being the head and the woman being the body just as Christ is the head and the Church is the body, the actual point Paul is making is that husbands are to love with such abandon and care that all dominance and hierarchy are subverted. “Paul’s is a radical statement of equality” in a very male dominant culture. “It is self-destroying to abuse, hurt, degrade, the spouse” (Kavanaugh, 97). Paul’s deeper, more subtle point in a very hierarchical culture is “to turn the code upside down; the emphasis rests no longer on the duty of the wife to the husband but on the husband’s love for his wife” (Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary*, 341).

It’s a natural desire to leave what doesn’t make sense or abandon what is hard. We can decide to leave or to stay. The news about the church in Pennsylvania last week was terrible. There are no excuses for allowing that kind of abuse to be tolerated or continued. We know it isn’t just in Pennsylvania but this kind of sickness and crime has infected the Catholic Church across the country and around the world. Some of us may decide, “This is too hard.” I am going to leave the Church.

But if we look around at the people at this Mass, our church is right here. This group of people is our parish; this is our community. We are the Catholic Church. The Catholic traditions and sacraments are a way to deepen our relationship with God and each other.

This is folly to many and scandalous to others. Yet what is at stake is what we believe and trust to be most true in our lives. We are infinitely loved and called. Bishops and priests, as servants of the People of God, must put survivors first; we priests and bishops and persons in consecrated life must, with the People of God, find ways to ensure that sexual abuse ends now. We, as the People of God, must grow away from clericalism which so often moves toward an arrogance and defensiveness rather than servant leadership.

So, what can we do beyond staying committed with hope? We can insist upon greater transparency and processes that are lay led. We can ask for changes to bring the lay experience into internal procedures of investigation and discipline. We can be part of a church committed to healing and to reaching out to those who have become disillusioned and disgusted. It will not be easy but we are each other’s strength by the grace of God.

In the gospels, at several points, like today, Jesus looks around as disciples are drifting away, leaving, and says to those he calls apostles, are you too leaving?



Peter answers for the twelve, and for us: “To whom would we turn? You have the words of eternal life.”