

W THE WEDNESDAY WORD

The Parish Version

Encountering Christ
Prayerfully preparing for the
Sunday Mass and praying in
particular for our school families



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 22nd August 2021 - The Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10-15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for 22nd August 2021 (John 6:60-69): We Believe Lord: to Whom Shall We Go?

After hearing his doctrine many of the followers of Jesus said, "This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?" Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, "Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, "This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him." After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you? Do you want to go away too?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God."



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

At the end of the Bread of Life Discourse there is a parting of the ways, but it is not primarily about belief in the Eucharist. That is the starting-point, but the lesson is wider. The Gospel of John is like a series of great forks in the road, one after another leading off the true path. A series of decisions is called for, whether to follow Jesus or not. Or it is like a series of court scenes, except that people are not judged; they judge themselves by their reaction to Jesus: at the Marriage Feast at Cana the disciples believe, but then in the Temple the people reject him; later Nicodemus sits on the fence, but the Samaritan Woman moves from cheeky scepticism to fervent apostleship; the great scenes in Jerusalem (the man at the Pool of Bethzatha, the blind man in the Temple) ironically show the people rejecting Jesus in such a way that they drive others to accept him; finally, before Pilate, the people think they are condemning Jesus when in fact they are condemning themselves by saying, 'We have no king but Caesar'. But what about the Lord as King of Israel? Day by day the challenge is aimed at ourselves too; do we believe or betray him?

What is the hardest decision that you have had to make in following Jesus? In what does the choice for or against Jesus consist?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 22nd August 2021



First Reading: *Renewal of the Covenant at Shechem*

Joshua 24:1-2. 15-18

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem; then he called the elders, leaders, judges and scribes of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Then Joshua said to all the people, "If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living. As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord." The people answered, "We have no intention of deserting the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed. We too will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

This final chapter of the Book of Joshua shows Israel settled into the 'land flowing with milk and honey', having concluded the great trek of the Exodus. At Shechem they held a great assembly of all the tribes, and renewed the covenant, with promises of loyalty to the Lord. The renewal of the covenant was necessary because in the course of their desert wandering a number of various tribes had joined Moses' original group of escaped slaves, and not all of them had been present at the original covenant. This scene at Shechem is put in parallel to today's gospel reading because Joshua challenged the people to make up their minds whether or not they intended to remain loyal to the Lord; in the same way, Jesus challenges the disciples at the end of the Bread of Life Discourse. The similarity is not only a challenge to loyalty, but specifically to covenant loyalty: the Eucharistic setting of the Discourse puts the departure of some of the disciples and the acceptance by Peter and the others into the context of refusing or accepting the New Covenant made by Jesus at the Last Supper.

What is the connection between the Old Testament Covenant and our Eucharist?

Second Reading: *The Mystery of Christ's Love*

Ephesians 5:21-32

Give way to one another in obedience to Christ. Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church submits to Christ, so should wives to their husbands, in everything. Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because it is his body - and we are its living parts. For this reason, a man must leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one body. This mystery has many implications; but I am saying it applies to Christ and the Church.

This final reading from Ephesians is rightly a favourite reading for weddings. Reading the first sentence it is, of course, vital that we avoid the impression of male chauvinism: wives should be subject to their husbands, but also husbands to their wives! The really enriching teaching, however, is that the devotion and self-sacrifice of husband for wife is seen as a parable for the love of Christ for his spouse, the Church. The love and devotion of spouses for each other - and it works both ways - gains greater dignity from this Christological truth. It is designated as a 'mystery', which in Pauline language does not mean 'something I can't understand', but the great profound truths about God which are to be finally revealed in the last times. In this case the 'mystery' is the depth and intensity of Christ's love for his Church, of which the love of spouses for each other is only an echo. The bonding and binding love and self-sacrifice of spouses echoes and reveals Christ's love for the Church. From this comparison we gain in understanding and awe respect for both husband and wife, and for Christ and the Church. This image also nicely sums up the repeated message of Ephesians about unity in the Church.

What can we learn from married love about Christ's love for the Church, and what can we learn from Christ's love about married love?

“ The depth and intensity of Christ's love for his Church. ”

The Wednesday Word: Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God
w: www.wednesdayword.org e: info@wednesdayword.org