

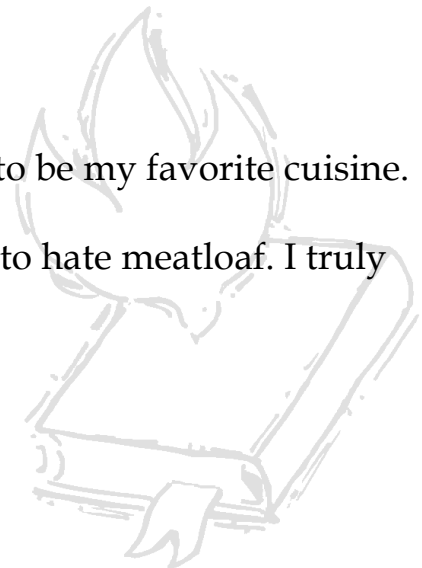
Homily
21st Sunday OT - B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 21-22, 2021

Josh 24:1-2, 15-17
Ps 34: 2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21, 22-23
Eph 5: 21-32
Jn 6: 60-69

As a priest of twenty-five plus years, I began to reflect on all the wonderful meals that I have shared with the many families I have served (and the way I look, it is obvious I have had many meals with many families). Most of these meals have been of the “hamburger and French fry” variety. There have been other occasions when I have dined on somewhat finer cuisine. Because my doctor has curbed my diet significantly, I have become partial to softer foods and much smaller portions of them. However, in light of my reflection on today’s scripture readings, I have come to the conclusion that the meal of which I am the fondest comes in the form of meatloaf with the tomato sauce crust and Italian Seasoning.

To be honest with you, meatloaf did not use to be my favorite cuisine. During the formative years of my youth, I used to hate meatloaf. I truly



began to hate this dish in my teen years when I found out that my mother used to cook meatloaf all the time as a way to get me to eat my vegetables. You see, I wasn't much of a vegetable person in my youth and no matter how much my family stressed the importance of vegetables in my diet, my youthful self would always reject anything that looked green or healthy on the plate. So when I noticed one day that a chunk of broccoli was popping out of my meatloaf and I realized what my mother had done, I kind of took this deception personally. It took me years to learn to enjoy the taste of vegetables and nowadays prefer to have the vegetables sitting *next* to the meatloaf than to be ground into it.

When I started to reflect about today's gospel reading, the first thing that came to my mind was that our Lord was communicating what I call "the meatloaf analogy" to the disciples that followed him. In reference to the culinary preferences of my youth, I knew that my mother was right, that vegetables were good tasting and good for my health, and I used to like meatloaf; when I found out what was in the recipe, I could not find enough courage to eat this particular dish. For the last six

weeks, we have listened to a sequence of readings from the sixth chapter of John's gospel, focusing on Jesus' discussion with his disciples on "The Bread of Life." At the beginning of this text, Jesus offered his followers a meal, something that pleased the crowds to their stomachs' content. But as our Lord took his leaders aside in order to instruct them about the conviction it takes to truly feed the hungry, the disciples realized how difficult it was to accept this gift of bread.

And like a teenager (or any of us) who doesn't pay attention to our parents' heeding, some of the disciples came up with the same conclusion to the Lord's instructions that He offered them. They, like many of us, say to the Lord, "Your work is too hard; it is easier for us to live our lives *our* way than to try and follow your way." And in the process, the faithful turned away from the Lord in order to return to their comfortable lives, a life that was based on values that were based on their own human whims.

As I reflected on the readings this week, I came to the realization that this theme of non-compliance to the faith has woven itself throughout the course of human history. In our first reading from Joshua, the main

character warns the people that they need to be allegiant to God in order to receive salvation. The final editors of the Book of Joshua lived around 586 BC, the time in history where the chosen people of God were cast away from their promised land. The message of the final editors was a warning to the chosen people, stating that God punishes those who do not keep the strength and faith of Joshua's message. In our gospel reading today, Jesus instructed the faithful in the ways of faith as well, challenging them to change their ways in order to receive the Bread of Life into their lives. Similar to the Book of Joshua, many rejected the challenge, telling the Lord that this challenge was too hard, preferring their own ways to the ways of their own creator.

When St. Pope John Paul II visited Toronto for *World Youth Day*, his words echoed this same type of "meatloaf" homily, albeit spoken more eloquently than I ever could. He stated to the youth of the last decade...

The "spirit of the world" offers many false illusions and parodies of happiness. There is perhaps no darkness deeper than the darkness that enters young people's souls when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith and hope and love. The greatest deception, and the deepest source of unhappiness, is the illusion of finding life by excluding

God, of finding freedom by excluding moral truths and personal responsibility.

The Lord is calling you to choose between these two voices competing for your souls. *That decision is our substance and challenge.* Why have you come together from all parts of the world? To say in your hearts: *"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* Who has the words of eternal life? *"You have the words of eternal life"* (Jn 6: 68). Jesus - the intimate friend of every young person - has the words of life.

The world you are inheriting is a world which desperately needs a new sense of brotherhood and human solidarity. It is a world which needs to be touched and healed by the beauty and richness of God's love. *It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you - to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.*

El "espíritu del mundo" *ofrece muchos espejismos, muchas parodias de la felicidad.* Quizá no haya tiniebla más densa que la que se introduce en el alma de los jóvenes cuando falsos profetas apagan en ellos la luz de la fe, de la esperanza y del amor. El engaño más grande, la mayor fuente de infelicidad es *el espejismo de encontrar la vida prescindiendo de Dios, de alcanzar la libertad excluyendo las verdades morales y la responsabilidad personal.*

El Señor los invita a elegir entre estas dos voces, que compiten por conquistar vuestra alma. *Esta elección es la esencia y el desafío de nosotros.* ¿Para qué habéis venido desde todas las partes del mundo? Para decir juntos a Cristo: *"Señor, ¿a quién iremos?"* (Jn 6, 68). *¿Quién, quién tiene palabras de vida eterna?* Jesús, el amigo íntimo de cada joven, tiene palabras de vida.

Lo que heredaran es un mundo que tiene necesidad urgente de un renovado sentido de fraternidad y solidaridad humana. Es un mundo que necesita ser tocado y curado por la belleza y la riqueza del amor de Dios. *El mundo actual necesita testigos de ese amor.* Necesita que ustedes sean *la sal de la tierra y la luz del mundo.*

In our society today, think about our response to the faith. If national statistics are correct, then about one third of the people who are registered in this parish are actively involved in the faith lives of their local community, contributing to the parish and living out the Christian faith as the Bible and tradition has set forth for us. If the statistics are correct, this would mean that about two thirds of our own community have been offered this meal but possibly have chosen to allow human whims to guide their lives rather than the will of God.

The challenge to the gospel message is in our response to not just accept the meal our Lord has offered us, but the difficult message that accompanies the meal, a message which we are challenged to live. And when we say “Amen” to this message, when we truly understand the life-saving power that this body and blood of Christ provides for us, then we truly understand how this Bread of Life feed our souls for the rest of our existence.

For the last few weeks, we have been challenged to receive this Bread of Life from God in the sixth chapter of St. John’s gospel. We have

received the invitation to come to the banquet on this Sabbath Day, on this Holy Day which we are told to put aside from all the other days of the week. We are told that this Mass is the “source and summit” and the heart of everything that we do. So the question is whether we have changed from the habits that the people of Joshua’s time. The question is whether we choose to accept the message that accompanies the meal or to reject God’s message in the same way of the disciples who abandoned our Lord at the foot of that mountain.

If we listen closely, then our response to God should reflect the sentiments offered by St. Peter in response to Jesus’ call. When Jesus asked his twelve apostles who remained why they had not rejected his message of salvation, St. Peter’s response was the proper call to faith, the same call to faith to which we are challenged to respond: “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

Let us make that same response to God. Let us instruct our children to the importance of this call the urgency to follow its message. For as important as it is for kids to eat their vegetables and to brush their teeth,

this message of God is exponentially more important than anything else we can teach our kids. For the message is simple: "The Lord is our bread of life; the Lord has the words of eternal life. For we have come to believe and are convinced that He is the Holy One of God!" This is our prayer.