

- Our readings today emphasize steadfastness...firmness of faith.
 - In our first reading from the book of Joshua, Joshua recounts the great blessings and victories and protections that God had given to His people.
 - Even so, over and over again the Israelites had rebelled against God...even after witnessing the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and so many other miracles.
 - And, of course, as the generations pass...we forget, we disbelieve...despite the testimony—often to death—of those in past generations.
 - So what Joshua is saying in our reading today when he says: “*Choose this day whom you will serve*” is “Choose truth, or choose a lie. Choose goodness, or choose evil. Choose the way of God...or not.
 - ...Joshua essentially repeating what Moses had challenged them with years before...just prior to their entering the Promised Land: “*...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you...*” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)
 - ...and, as we hear in the book of Sirach so poignantly: “*...to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him...he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin.*” (Sirach 15:15-20)
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- That “he has not given anyone permission to sin” question comes fairly frequently today, especially in our society’s “anything goes” sexual morals. People often argue that, because they “feel” something strongly, it must be good and right.

- Well, when Satan tempted Jesus in the desert to turn the stones into bread...after His forty-day fast He certainly “felt” like doing it, but He knew it would be against the will of God, so He did not.
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- Nobody sins in what they don't want to do, but rather in what they “feel” like doing—despite it being against God’s law and instruction to us. This is essentially the definition of sin.
- So be wary of acting on “feelings” absent reason, because feelings are no guarantee of the rightness and truth of an action. For instance, no one gets married to get divorced later, but they “feel” this is “the one” and “forever”.
- “Feelings” to do what is against God's will are simply the disordered part of our passions caused by Original Sin. Anything against the will of God, by definition, cannot be good.
- Yet we are given grace to overcome feelings which tempt us to act against the will and absolute good of God by our reason in knowing God’s truth, and adhering to it.
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- As for sexual morals, God has clearly taught that sexual relations are only NOT sinful--even mortally sinful--if not within a valid marriage, which exists only between man and woman...in the beauty of them coming together to be one flesh, most divinely when they become pro-creators—for creation of new life and images of God...co-creators with God Himself.
- They, with His assistance, provide the flesh and earthly life...and He provides the soul and eternal life.
- This is divine, not human, law.
- This is why we priests, the Church—Pope Francis Himself—is so ardent in urging people to have irregular marriages made well and holy.
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- Just as the disciples who left Jesus said: “This saying is hard; who can accept it?”...He asks us, too: “*Do you also want to leave?*”

- But, as Peter had the wisdom to declare: “*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...you are the Holy One of God.*”
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- Now, I’ve spoken to several who have had their faith shaken with these Pennsylvania revelations of a couple of weeks ago.
 - Doubt, distrust, disdain, despair...all of it the rotten and poisonous fruit that such reports cultivate...just as Satan hopes and plans.
 - But, because of his success in perverting clergy, even though it be a small percentage, this causes negative perceptions within the faithful of the Church itself...and even of Christianity.
 - One cannot but recall St. Paul: “*...such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ... even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*” (2 Corinthians 11:13-14)
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- The Israelites in a way had it easy: they witnessed first-hand many miracles of God...and yet still they rebelled...still Joshua had to challenge them to stay faithful.
- The disciples of Jesus also in many ways had it easy; they witnessed first-hand the His many miracles...and still many left Him, as we heard in the Gospel.
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- Yes, our faith is based on the testimony of others—the apostles most especially. WE don’t get to go on the beach to see the sea parted, or put our fingers into the holes in Jesus’ hand and side.
- But miracles exist nonetheless. And one miracle that WE witness longer-term is the continued existence of the Church over two millennia...despite war, persecution, scandals, etc.
- The Church will survive this scandal as well, as horrid as it is...for we recall the letter to the Hebrews: “*...faith is the assurance of*

things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)...and Jesus assures us that the gates of Hell will NOT prevail against His Church. (cf. Mathew 16:18)

- So, with our God-given reason we can see the “reason-ability” and truth of our faith,...and remember Jesus’ assurance to Thomas after the resurrection: *“Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* (John 20:29)

Reading 1 [Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b](#)

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem,
summoning their elders, their leaders,
their judges, and their officers.

When they stood in ranks before God,
Joshua addressed all the people:

“If it does not please you to serve the LORD,
decide today whom you will serve,
the gods your fathers served beyond the River
or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling.
As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

But the people answered,

“Far be it from us to forsake the LORD

for the service of other gods.

For it was the LORD, our God,
who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt,
out of a state of slavery.

He performed those great miracles before our very eyes
and protected us along our entire journey
and among the peoples through whom we passed.

Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21](#)

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The LORD has eyes for the just,
and ears for their cry.

The LORD confronts the evildoers,
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,
and from all their distress he rescues them.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Many are the troubles of the just one,
but out of them all the LORD delivers him;

he watches over all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading II

[Eph 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is head of his wife

just as Christ is head of the church,

he himself the savior of the body.

As the church is subordinate to Christ,

so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ loved the church

and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,

cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,

that he might present to himself the church in splendor,

without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,

that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh

but rather nourishes and cherishes it,

even as Christ does the church,

because we are members of his body.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother

and be joined to his wife,

and the two shall become one flesh.

This is a great mystery,

but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

or

Brothers and sisters:

Live in love, as Christ loved us.

Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ loved the church

and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,

cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,

that he might present to himself the church in splendor,

without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,

that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh

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and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.*
This is a great mystery,
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Gospel

[Jn 6:60-69](#)

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said,
"This saying is hard; who can accept it?"
Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this,
he said to them, "Does this shock you?
What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending
to where he was before?
It is the spirit that gives life,
while the flesh is of no avail.
The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.
But there are some of you who do not believe."
Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe
and the one who would betray him.
And he said,
"For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me
unless it is granted him by my Father."

As a result of this,
many of his disciples returned to their former way of life
and no longer accompanied him.
Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"
Simon Peter answered him, "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."