

Offensive Christianity!

Joshua 24^{1-2a,14-18}; Psalm 34^{15-end}; Ephesians 6¹⁰⁻²⁰; John 6⁵⁶⁻⁶⁹

Does the offend you? [John 6⁶¹]

What a dangerous thing it is when people adopt a pick-and-mix approach to faith.

In the readings today we have:

- ✦ Joshua, exasperated with the Hebrews because they show no commitment to God - they opt in and out of the practice of their faith and allegiance to God and Joshua brings this to a head;
- ✦ Paul is impatient, knowing that he is about to be executed - and he needs the Church to wake up to a spiritual battle that can only be fought in prayer;
- ✦ Having spent the previous 4 weeks on Jesus and the **bread of life** in the aftermath of the feeding of the 5000, I get the sense that he is at the end of his patience - neither the crowd nor the disciples have grasped the metaphor of the **bread of life**. You can almost hear Jesus shout at those around him, **it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless** and then follows it up with what he said before, **no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father**.

Jesus knows that this isn't what people wanted: they wanted happy, self-affirming teaching and free meals along the way. His response is to confront them with a question, **does this offend you?** It is almost as if he says to the crowd, **DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO?** as he says, **what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?**

Things haven't changed much:

- ✦ People still get offended that (like Joshua) we present Christianity as an exclusive choice - to choose to follow Christ means you exclude things that draw you away from Christ. How dare the Church expect that people prioritise worship over hobbies, how dare we draw out of ancient history the challenge, **choose this day whom you will serve!**
- ✦ People still get offended that we talk about evil and that we need to be engaged in the struggle against it. We too easily believe the lie that the Devil

is a caricature - and he isn't! What? Armour isn't decorative? Can't I hide behind someone who knows their Bible better or use someone else's faith as a shield? How dare the Church suggest that we have to pray! It was our friend, Bishop Rowan, who said that the problem with prayer isn't that God doesn't turn up, it is that we don't turn up! We allow ourselves to be distracted so that when we intend to pray we work things through for ourselves and we don't leave room for God.

- ✦ People get offended when we talk about Jesus as unique, yet that is at the heart of our faith.
- ✦ People get offended when they are expected to experience faith for themselves - Joshua points to the God whom they have experienced: the God who **brought them out of Egypt**, who **protected them along the way** and who **drove out the people** so that they could have the land He promised to them. Or when John says that **we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God**. It is the living with Jesus that makes us experience him more, and that experience strengthens faith!

Until we, with Peter faced with the option of giving up, say, **Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life** then we will struggle to see beyond the offence that Jesus means to cause.