

(B21) SUNDAY 21 OF THE YEAR

(AUGUST 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021)

**Readings:** *Joshua 24:1 – 2, 15 – 18; Ps. 33 (34):1, 16 – 22; Ephesians 5:21 – 32; John 6:60 – 69.*

Today we hear the last of our readings from the letter to the Ephesians. Because of last week's Solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady we have missed a passage which speaks of the moral conduct of Christians and of the importance of thanksgiving in the life of the community: *Be filled with the Spirit...always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.*

Now the writer turns to a particular aspect of life in the Christian community – the different kinds of relationships between Christians. Our reading today gives us instruction on only one of the three pairs in the letter, namely the relationship between husbands and wives. It is followed in the first nine verses of chapter six by instruction on the relationships between children and parents and between slaves and masters.

This passage has similarities with passages in other New Testament writings, particularly Colossians (3:18 – 4:1), but also 1 Peter (2:18 – 3:7) and to a lesser extent the letters to Timothy and Titus. The description *Household Code* is often given to such passages, and it has been shown that they have much in common with instructions given by pagan Greek and Roman writers, which had influenced the teaching in synagogues in the Greek-speaking world.

But there is a significant difference in the way the teaching is given in this letter. The first thing to note is the general instruction given in the first sentence of today's reading: *Give way to one another in obedience to Christ.* This motive is applied to all three sets of relationships – indeed this single sentence is almost sufficient in itself for us who live in very different societies.

Each of the three relationships has been “christianized”, by relating it to an aspect of doctrine. So, the relationship of a wife to her husband is likened to the relationship between the Church and Christ, who *loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy.* In later verses children will be told that obedience to parents will gain the reward promised in the Commandments – *that it may be well with you, and you may live long on earth.* Slaves and masters alike are taught that they have a heavenly master – Christ himself.

All this teaching is intended to show that the whole of a Christian's life is to be Christ-centred.