

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, Massachusetts
August 25-26, 2018



Scripture Readings: [Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-18b](#) ✕ [Psalm 34](#) ✕ [Ephesians 5:21-32](#) ✕ [John 6:60-69](#)

At one point during the Civil War, President Lincoln's cabinet was confronted with the uncovering of a Washington spy ring that was providing key information to the Confederacy. Not only was President Lincoln disturbed about the security issues that were involved, he was also deeply disturbed at the disloyalty of so many people whom he thought were Union supporters.

After all the evidence was presented, the Secretary of War turned to the President and asked for orders. Lincoln, who had said nothing during the meeting, was visibly disturbed. He expressed his feelings with a story about the dilemma faced by an old farmer who had a massive shade tree towering over his house.

The majestic-looking tree seemed perfect in every way. It had stood for many years and provided relief from the heat of the sun for all of his family.

One morning, while at work in his garden, the farmer saw a squirrel run up the tree into a hole. The farmer went to investigate and, fearing the worst, he looked into the hole. Sure enough, he discovered that the stately tree, so prized for its grandeur and beauty, was hollow from top to bottom. Only a rim of solid wood remained, barely enough to support the tree's weight.

The farmer couldn't decide what to do about the tree. If he cut the tree down, it would do considerable damage because of its tremendous height and breadth. If he left it alone, a bad wind or storm would certainly knock it down, ruining the family's house and probably injuring or killing anyone inside.

He couldn't decide what to do. He wished he never knew it was a problem. Turning away, he cursed, "I wish I had never seen that squirrel!"

As St. John recounts in today's Gospel reading, Jesus' words are difficult for many to hear. While they – and we – know that Jesus' call to conversion of life and reconciliation are of God, we may sometimes wish we had never heard them because they require much of us. It is a part of human nature that sometimes we would rather be left alone in our happy and comfortable unawareness.

The Gospel of Jesus *can* be hard to absorb: Jesus' command that His disciples must be forgiving and merciful run contrary to what our human nature and convention often dictate; Gospel justice can make us very uncomfortable and uneasy.

Many people cannot "endure this kind of talk" not because they don't understand Jesus but because they understand all too well. To be worthy of the name of Christ demands the constant, focused, and honest faith articulated by Simon Peter: "You LORD, have the words of everlasting life." ✕