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A homily for the Friday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Friday, August 15, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Joshua 24:1–13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 136:1–3, 16–18, 21–22, 24 | **Response:** His mercy endures forever.

Gospel Acclamation: 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Gospel Reading: Matthew 19:3–12

Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

There is a kind of remembering that renews. Not just the backward glance of nostalgia, but the holy act of recounting—of recalling with the heart—the deeds of God that have brought us this far. That is the remembering we are drawn into today, as Joshua gathers all Israel at Shechem (Joshua 24:1–13). The place is no accident. It is a place already heavy with memory—Abraham built an altar there when he first heard the promise of land and blessing (Genesis 12). Jacob dug a well there, and buried the foreign gods his household had clung to. Now, centuries later, Joshua stands on the soil that carries the weight of promise and the pull of temptation, and he speaks not his own words, but God's: “I took your father Abraham from beyond the River... I gave him Isaac... I brought your fathers out of Egypt... I gave you a land you had not laboured for.”

Notice the rhythm. I took. I gave. I brought. I sent. Not once does Joshua glorify Israel's own ingenuity or strength. It is all grace, all gift. Even the victories are not theirs to boast of: “It was not by your sword or your bow.” That kind of re-

remembering unmasks the illusion of self-sufficiency. And what a needed unmasking, in Zimbabwe today, where we see again the fragility of human plans. We have built economies on sand, not stone. We have entrusted too much to the bow and not enough to the blessing.

But Joshua is not only recounting. He is renewing. This is a covenant moment—a spiritual referendum. He is placing a question before the people that echoes through the ages: Whom will you serve? The gods of comfort, control, convenience—or the God who brings water from the rock and bread from the sky?

The psalmist takes up that same holy remembering (Psalm 136), with a chant that is as sturdy as a heartbeat: “for his love endures forever.” Twenty-six times we are reminded. His love endures—not fleeting or fickle, not dependent on our performance or our piety. This is a love that marches through history, that splits seas and scatters kings, that gives land to the lowly and saves his people from their foes. And still today, in our forgotten corners and bruised communities, that love endures. It endures in the woman who feeds a neighbour’s children when there is not enough for her own. It endures in the man who stays honest though the system tempts him otherwise. It endures in the quiet acts of mercy that no one applauds.

And then we arrive at the Gospel (Matthew 19:3–12), where Jesus, like Joshua before him, speaks to hearts too accustomed to compromise. The Pharisees come not to listen but to trap, to make him choose sides in a debate already thick with rabbinical wrangling. But Jesus does not argue in the footnotes. He goes back to the beginning—to Genesis, to the garden, to the God who makes two one. “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” In a culture where a man could dismiss his wife with little more than a notice, Jesus reclaims the sanctity and mutual dignity of marriage. He lifts the woman from being a possession to being a partner. No wonder the disciples, steeped in patriarchal assumptions, are scandalised.

Yet Jesus’ words are not only for married couples. They are for all of us who belong to covenants. For vows, once made, are not just legalities. They are the soil in which love learns to grow, to endure, to forgive, to be faithful. Whether the vow

is made at an altar or at profession, it demands the daily dying to self and the daily rising with Christ. And here Ignatian spirituality's use of imagination can help us. For we are invited not only to hear these words, but to feel them, to taste their meaning. Imagine yourself at Shechem. You hear Joshua's voice. What are the idols you still carry, hidden like Jacob's household gods beneath the sycamore? Or stand with Jesus and the crowd. How do his words on fidelity and love land in your heart?

The vows we make—to God, to one another, to the poor, to the truth—must shape not only our private holiness but our public hope. In a nation where contracts are broken, promises made lightly, and commitments frayed by fear or fatigue, our witness to covenantal faithfulness matters. The Church's call to uphold the dignity of marriage is not a weapon against the broken but a lamp for the confused. We are called not to condemn the wounded, but to walk beside them. We are called to honour the longing for love, and to offer a community where no one bears their burden alone.

So let us remember. Let us renew. Let us choose again the covenant that carries us. Let us set down the gods of self and security, and take up the cross that leads to life.

And as we go from this place, let us ask ourselves:

- What forgotten act of God in my life needs to be remembered with gratitude today?
- What idol—subtle or strong—have I been clinging to, that I need to bury beneath the tree of the cross?
- What vow have I made—before God, before others—that needs to be rekindled, not by willpower, but by grace?

May the One who took us, who gave to us, who brought us out and led us in, continue to carry us—ever deeper into covenant, ever closer to Christ.

Amen.

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