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Saturday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Saturday, August 16, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Joshua 24:14–29
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16:1–2a, 5, 7–8, 11 | **Response:** Psalm 16:5a
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 11:25
Gospel Reading: Matthew 19:13–15
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our first reading today, from the Book of Joshua (Joshua 24:14–29), takes us to Shechem, where an old man — weathered by war, by wilderness wandering, by the weight of leading God's people — gathers the tribes for one last solemn moment. Joshua is about to die, and like a father at the family table, he wants to leave his children not just with memories, but with a decision. He stands before them, not as a victorious general boasting of battles won, but as a witness to what God has done. He names the mighty works — the deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Jordan, the land now under their feet — and then he sets before them a stark choice: "Choose today whom you will serve." The question is not whether they will serve someone, but whom they will serve.

Joshua knows the danger. He warns them, almost with a prophet's severity, that divided hearts cannot hold onto God. To take the covenant lightly is to slip back into slavery, whether to the idols of Egypt or the comfortable compromises of the Canaanites. His words echo through the centuries, not only to Israel, but to us: if God has been faithful to you, will you be faithful to Him? In Zimbabwe today, we stand in our own Shechem moments — confronted with choices about honesty in public life, justice in the face of economic hardship, integrity when corruption is easier, generosity when selfishness promises security. The covenant Joshua speaks of is not only ancient history; it is the daily pledge of our hands and our hearts to God's justice and mercy in the here and now.

Our psalm (Psalm 16) puts words to what such loyalty feels like from the inside: "O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup." The psalmist does not speak of God as an occasional visitor, but as the very landscape of his life. He rests se-

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cure because God is near, his inheritance because God is enough. The image is almost tactile — God as the cool shade in the heat, the steady footing on an uncertain path. There is a hint here of the Ignatian grace of indifference, that interior freedom to hold wealth or poverty, health or sickness, with open hands, because God alone is the treasure. In a nation where so many face uncertainty over food, jobs, or the future, this psalm is both challenge and comfort: to set the Lord always before us, to find our security not in what can be taken away, but in the One who cannot be taken away.

And then, in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 19:13–15), we see the Lord Himself receiving the least and the littlest. Parents bring their children for a blessing, but the disciples, perhaps thinking of the "important" business at hand, try to send them away. Jesus' response is swift and tender: "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them." Here the kingdom is revealed not in might or mastery, but in welcome and wonder. In Jewish culture of the time, children were not the centre of family life in the way we might think; they were dependent, without rights, without power. Yet Jesus says the kingdom belongs to such as these. The implication is uncomfortable: if we would enter His kingdom, we must not come with credentials but with empty hands.

There is a deep Ignatian invitation here: to imagine ourselves as one of those children, running through the dust, hearing His voice call us closer. What do His eyes look like as He blesses us? What stirs in our hearts as He lays His hands upon us? And when we rise, how will we carry that blessing into our families, our work, our streets — especially to those the world tries to push aside? In Zimbabwe's current struggles, the "little ones" are not only children but the elderly in neglected care homes, the unemployed youth whose dreams are deferred, the poor who are told to wait while others eat first. The Gospel asks whether we are disciples who block the way or disciples who clear the path for them to be embraced.

The saint we honour today, Stephen of Hungary, knew something of this. A king, yes, but one who saw his crown as a service, not a possession. He built churches, defended the poor, instructed his son to be merciful above all, warning that pride and oppression rot a kingdom from within. Like Joshua, he set before his people a covenant choice; like the psalmist, he found his security in God; like Jesus, he

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welcomed the weak and made them the measure of his rule. His life tells us that leadership in God's eyes is measured not by how many serve you, but by how many you serve.

So the unifying thread runs from Shechem to the psalm to the children in Galilee: the call to undivided loyalty to God, the joy of finding our portion in Him alone, the humility to enter the kingdom as the least. This is not sentimental religion; it is the strength and joy of discipleship. It will ask of us the daily choice to resist idols — not only of wood and stone, but of greed, fear, and self-importance — and to embrace the God who first embraced us.

Three questions, then, for our prayer this week:

- If I stood at Shechem today, what would I need to set aside in order to choose the Lord with my whole heart?
- Where, in the challenges of my daily life, am I seeking security in something other than God, and how can I return to finding my portion in Him?
- Who are the "little ones" God is placing before me this week, and how am I making space for them to encounter His blessing through me?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.