

Today's readings are about choices

We all make them

Everyday choices

When we get up

What we eat

What we wear

Everyone here made a choice to be here

Those not here also made a choice

We make choices that alter the course of our lives

What we will study

Who we might marry

The line of work we desire

Where we choose to live

Choices impact our lives

So how do we make them?

What influences the choices we make?

Wisdom literature spells out that life is a series of choices

This book of Sacred Scripture is grounded in experience

It is not about theory

But real life

And just like real life

No one piece of advice can be applied to every circumstance

The guidelines are there

To be filled out and lived by each generation

By each person

This is part of the mystery of human life

What might seem so clear to one person

Is rejected by another

Even with similar experiences and education

How is this possible?

We cannot explain it

Although science may try to identify a specific gene to explain it

It comes down to how we are made

With free will, in the image of God

Wisdom literature follows trial and error

Learning from mistakes

And trying to pass on what was learned

But it seems each generation is bent on making their own mistakes

So what is wisdom?

And how do we attain it?

It is not human wisdom that we seek at the deepest level

It is divine wisdom

Human wisdom is fleeting

Divine wisdom is eternal

We will only attain it if we are humble,

And open our hearts to God's voice

God desires to give us this heavenly gift

But we have to accept it

Then we apply it

St. Paul speaks to this in our second reading

Here he appeals to Philemon to go against human wisdom

Philemon had a runaway slave

He went to Paul, and converted to Christianity

At this time, slavery was legal custom

And Paul recognizes this

Although he does not condone it

Neither does he contend conversion to Christianity is a human refuge

Life is difficult

For Christians and for non-Christians

So Paul challenges Philemon

To accept Onesimus back, not as a slave

But as a brother in Christ

Onesimus had broken the law

He had escaped, and if caught deserved punishment

But his escape from Philemon led him to Christ

And that led him back to Philemon

Not as a slave

But as a brother

God's ways are not man's ways

Making the choice to be a follower of Christ cost Philemon

It cost Onesimus

It cost Paul

It costs us today

That is central to our Gospel reading

At the beginning

Great crowds are following Jesus

If we continue reading to his passion

How many continue to follow?

He is abandoned by almost everyone

Only a few of the women are there

Along with John at the foot of the cross

So why did so many gather earlier on?

What were they seeing?

Who were they seeking?

A miracle worker?

Someone they liked because he put the scribes and Pharisees in their place

Because of how he treated sinners?

Jesus gives a tough teaching today

But did the crowds listen?

Do we listen?

If you desire to follow me

You have to hate your closest family

Mother, father, husbands, wives

Brothers and sisters

Do we take this literally?

Jesus came and walked this earth as a part of a specific family

The Holy Trinity is the model of the human family

He calls us to love both God and neighbor

He clearly holds the family in high regard

So what is he telling us?

He is telling us that to be his disciple is not easy

We will not simply float into heaven

If we try to skim by through this life

It will not go well with us in eternity

We have to have our priorities straight

This wholehearted commitment to Christ comes with something else

It comes with a cross

A cross we are called to pick up every day

For the Israelite people, this was a shocking claim

Because a cross was not something they liked to hang on their walls

Something removed from their everyday existence

Something they could clean up

Like we try to do

Replacing the crucifix with an empty cross or the resurrected Jesus

We don't like to be reminded of how he got there

But for the Israelites, it was a gruesome reality

It was the most humiliating, shameful way to be put to death

It was the most horrifying thing the Romans could come up with

It was meant not only to punish the guilty

It was meant to smash any desire of association

Jesus tells us this is what it will cost us to follow him

This is what it costs to be a disciple

And it is not only for bishops, priests, nuns and religious

It is for all disciples

There are not two tracks of Catholicism

One that has the cross

One that is for those who are really dedicated

For those willing to give up marriage and families

Success in business and creature comforts

And another track for everyone else

For those that don't have a 'vocation'

An easier life

One with a spouse, kids

A fancy house, climb the corporate ladder

Have the good things in life

Just follow the commandments, obey the law

Be a good person

That is not what Jesus tells us today

This life is not a game

Christianity is not a hobby

Something I dabble with for an hour on Sunday

If something else doesn't come up that takes priority

No, he tells us that we have to make a choice

And not an easy choice

Not one that will take us down the path of least resistance

In fact it may take us down a path that leaves loved ones behind

Being a disciple requires priorities

It is a demanding life

Not an impossible life

It requires choices

And the courage to keep the ones we make

To choose to be a disciple of Jesus does not mean to turn our backs on our loved ones

It is to love them in a new way

It is a call to love all as brothers and sisters

No longer looking on them as employees or service providers

No longer looking on others as a class of people

But to see them as brothers and sisters

And treat them as such

And we do these things today

Because tomorrow may not come

We only have a limited amount of time to make choices

Are my choices leading to an eternity with God?

Or away from Him?

A Man for All Seasons: Thomas More