

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 1, 2008 A

TWO CHOICES

Today's first reading and gospel remind us of the respective consequences that will come to those who choose to follow or not follow God's word and will. Let's look at both readings.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32

The long years of wandering in the desert are over. The Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land where they will encounter neighbors who believe in other gods. In these verses, Moses exhorts the Israelites to make sure that they remain faithful to their covenant with God by following his word. They must take the commandments into their hearts and souls. As an external expression of their interior conversion the Israelites are 'to wear the law on their wrists and let them be a pendant [something suspended] on their foreheads'. True holiness demands internal conversion. Then Moses sets before the people a "blessing and a curse". Following God's word will bring blessings. Disobeying God's word and following other gods will bring divine retribution.

Reflecting on the first reading, Alice Camille writes:

From our earliest years, we have choices to make. Do your homework or get in trouble with the teacher. Eat your vegetables or no dessert. The choices, regrettably, don't stay this simple, and the consequences grow more serious as we get older. Do your work or get fired - and your whole family suffers the loss of income. Eat right or accumulate health problems—which can lead to disease, disability, even death.

Is God punishing us with bad consequences, or are we reaping the harvest we ourselves have sown? Choices are set before us in every hour: to love or hate, to be generous or selfish, to help or hinder, to grow wiser or more foolish. No one is holding a gun to our heads most of the time as we choose. But that doesn't mean we aren't shooting ourselves in the foot now and again by the decisions we make.

Reflection Question

What criteria do you use to make decisions?

GOSPEL: Matthew 7:21-27

This reading is the concluding verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (chs 5, 6, and 7). The reading begins with a judgment scene. God the Father is the judge and Jesus is an advocate. Those being judged will turn to Jesus to plead their case: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name?'" Jesus' response emphasizes the importance of internal conversion. He says that it is not enough to keep company with Jesus and perform charismatic acts in his name. They must *act* with love and justice. Baptism and membership in a church will not be enough to save us. One must be making a sincere effort to follow God's will in all things. Jesus concludes his long Sermon on the Mount by using a theme common in wisdom literature: he offers the disciple two ways, the way of the wise (building one's life on God's word) and the way of the foolish (ignoring God's word).

Reflecting on today's gospel, the authors of *Living Liturgy* write:

We invest a great deal of time and energy in making certain choices during our lives, for example, which house to buy, what school to attend, what career to choose, the best health plan, etc. and once we decide, we act on it. The gospel requires the same decisive action.

Yes, in life we are faced with many choices, but the gospel informs us that there is one basic choice (the foundation, the rock) upon which all others must be made. That one choice is to live by Jesus' words and put into action what we have heard. Without this foundation, all other choices are like building our life on sand. In fact, the fundamental choice is for a life that does not collapse or a life that does collapse. The fundamental choice is for a life in obedience to God, a life with God at the center.

Unlike the examples of mighty deeds mentioned in the gospel (prophesying, driving out demons), what

Jesus asks of us is simply to be faithful to his words and commandments in our everyday lives. Listening to his words may mean listening to another's cry for help or it may mean that we spend some time alone in quiet prayer, being attentive to Jesus' abiding presence. Putting Jesus' words into practice may mean taking the time to be kind to a coworker; or it may mean sharing our abundance with those less fortunate. Building on rock ultimately means that we choose to give ourselves over for the good of another.

Choosing to Fall in Love with God

The late Pedro Arrupe, former Superior General of the Jesuits, wrote the following piece which fits in nicely with making the good choice of choosing God. He writes:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

GOD AS MY FIRST LOVE

Lord God,

I know that if I do not love you with
all my heart, with all my mind,
with all my soul and with all my strength,
I shall love something else
with all my heart and mind
and soul and strength.

Grant that, putting you first in all
my loving, I may be liberated from all
lesser loves and loyalties,
and have you as my first love,
my chief good and my final joy.

Amen

(adapted from George Appleton)

PRAYER OF SPOUSES FOR EACH OTHER

Lord Jesus, grant that I and my spouse
may have a true and understanding
love for each other.

Grant that we may both be filled
with faith and trust.

Give us the grace to live with each other
in peace and harmony.

May we always bear with one another's
weaknesses and grow from
each other's strengths.

Help us to forgive one another's failings
and grant us patience, kindness,
cheerfulness, and the spirit of placing the
well-being of one another ahead of self.

May the love that brought us together grow
and mature with each passing year.

Bring us both closer to You through
our love for each other.

Let our love grow to perfection.

Amen

PRAYER FOR ONE'S HOME

Visit, we beseech you, O Lord,
this dwelling and drive
far from it all snares of the enemy;
let your holy angels dwell herein,
to preserve us in peace;
and let your blessing be upon us forever.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Have a blessed week,

