

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—C

Today we are invited to think about decisions. Life-changing decisions! Some are *forced* on us by the death of a parent, suffering a divorce, the collapse of our business, hurricanes, floods, fires, a terrible accident. Sometimes in an instant our life changes and we are forced to come to some important decisions.

Some life-decisions are *leisurely*. Choosing a college, choosing a trade, choosing a spouse, changing our career, joining the military, joining the church, entering the seminary or joining a religious community are all examples of somewhat leisurely decisions. They are made when the time is right, not on the spur of the moment. There is preparation and thought and commitment.

The Scriptures today present us with the reality of life-changing decisions. God has a plan for each of us. Just as Elijah and Elisha were called by God to be prophets so we are called to the vocation God has planned for us. Once Elisha said, “yes” to God, he did the right thing. He said goodbye to his parents. And had a farewell meal with his people. Did this mean he never saw his parents or friends again? Read the first Book of Kings. What *is* certain is that he decided to place God’s *call* above everything else.

In the second reading St. Paul tells us that the *Holy Spirit* must guide our decisions. Our freedom means making choices consistent with the way God created us. He left us Christ’s Church *guided by the Holy Spirit* to teach us we are children of God and that God has loved us with an everlasting love, even before we existed. God knows that our free decision

to return that love by keeping his commandments is like the Father's free decision when he asked his Son to become man and die for us.

The Gospel tells us that we must be firm in our decisions come what may. "When the days for Jesus' being taken up [on the cross] were fulfilled, he resolutely *determined* [decided] to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him." Dealing with the unreceptive Samaritans was one thing but dealing with Jerusalem, the place of his crucifixion was another. Yet he "resolutely" went forward.

You can't drive a car looking in the rear view mirror. You look through the front windshield. If you are constantly living in your past you are going nowhere in life. What's more you are likely to crash. Living in the past makes it difficult to embrace the vocation God has planned for us. It is not easy for spouses to start a new family. Some spouses live in the past. They have difficulty cutting the apron strings and surrendering in love to their spouse. Our emotional, spiritual growth may not have kept pace with our physical or intellectual growth and tie us to the past.

Decisions demand sacrifice. If our decisions are good, the sacrifices deepen our spiritual growth. If our decisions are bad, the sacrifices rob us of God's peace. We cannot have things of value and at the same time live foot-loose and fancy-free. All commitments involve sacrifice. All growth involves sacrifice.

Our culture makes decisions and commitments difficult because it promotes self-centeredness and selfishness. It makes commitment difficult. If we are in the *habit* of making *selfish* decisions, the habit takes over and takes away our freedom. If we are in the *habit* of making generous decisions, the habit takes over and gives us freedom. Generosity eliminates sacrifice as an obstacle to commitment.

The greatest decision in human history occurred when God, moved by His infinite love, decided to bridge the unimaginable chasm between us and become man. God's Son took on our humanity and became one of us. The Blessed Virgin Mary's decision to respond to God's glorious messenger, the Archangel Gabriel, with her profound "Yes, be it done unto me according to your word," forever opened the way for us to return back home to our Father in heaven.

We are never freer than when we decide to do what God wants us to do. We can never find greater happiness than when we decide to join Mary in her "yes" to God's will.

"You are my inheritance, Lord," is a prayer that holds great meaning for seminarians. The "inheritance" referred to in today's antiphon is the dividing up of the Promised Land among the Israelites after their long journey from Egypt. The portion of the tribe of the Levites, i.e., the tribe of the priests, was not any particular parcel of land but God himself. The road to the priesthood, although not as long today as it was in my time, still demands a great deal of courage, perseverance, hope, and a sense of mission. It demands a strong belief in the gift the share in Christ's Priesthood is. Most priests, if asked at this very moment, what the biggest blessing is that sustains you, would say the celebration of mass. "*You* are my inheritance, O Lord." "O Lord, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot."You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever."

Decisions must be based on the belief in blessings as well as sacrifice. "I set the Lord ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed." At the time I was ordained in 1967 the church was reeling from the sexual revolution, the rebellion against authority, and the

misinterpretation of Vatican II. More than one priest asked himself, “What did I sign up for?” The answer to that is “to be faithful no matter what comes.” No matter what comes, the decision I made will be validated by the blessings Christ has promised to those who leave home, father and mother, etc. for a reward a hundred times as great in heaven.

I believe your decisions must also be based on trust in God’s blessings no matter what. Life is what happens to you while you are planning something else. Deciding to be faithful to God no matter what will always reap untold blessings. So let us all pray fervently today, “You are my inheritance, O Lord.”