

HOMILY
26TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME
CHOICES!!
(Deacon Ron)

“Henry” was a man who always made the wrong choices. If he bet on a baseball game, the team he chose would lose. If he chose between two elevators, the one he entered would stall between floors. If he chose one line at the bank over another, his line would never move. One day, Henry had to take an airplane trip to a distant city. He was pleased to learn that he could not choose between planes. There was only one plane that could get him to his destination on time. With no choice to make, he would come to no grief, Henry reasoned. Shortly after takeoff, the engines caught fire. It became obvious that the plane would crash. Immediately, Henry began praying to his favorite saint: St. Francis. “Dear St. Francis”, he cried out, “you know I have never made a right choice in my life. But this time I had no choice. Why then am I being punished in this way?” Suddenly, a giant hand swooped down from the heavens and snatched Henry from the falling plane. A heavenly voice said, “Henry, my son, I can save you, if you have sincerely called upon me.” “Oh, yes, I have in truth called upon you, St. Francis.” “Then tell me Henry,” said the heavenly voice, “*which* St. Francis? St. Francis of *Assisi* or St. Francis *Xavier*?”

OUR READINGS TODAY PRESENT US WITH SITUATIONS IN WHICH PEOPLE HAVE TO MAKE CHOICES. IN THE FIRST READING WE HAVE THE PERSON WHO EITHER CHOOSES TO TURN AWAY FROM LIVING A VIRTUOUS LIFE TO PERSON WHO DECIDES TO TURN FROM EVIL TO LIVING A VIRTUOUS LIFE. IN BOTH CASE EACH WILL DIE, BUT WHERE THEY WILL END UP AFTERWARDS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

IN THE SECOND READING PAUL INVITES HIS FLEDGLING CHURCH IN PHILIPPI TO CHOOSE WHAT WILL BE THE ATTITUDE BY WHICH THEY WILL LIVE THEIR NEW FOUND CHRISTIAN LIFE. HE INVITES THEM AS HE INVITES US TO PUT ON THE SAME ATTITUDE AS CHRIST. WHO THOUGH HE WAS GOD, CHOSE TO BECOME HUMAN;’ ALTHOUGH HE WAS ALL POWERFUL, HE CHOSE TO BECOME A SLAVE TO ALL; ALTHOUGH HE WAS ETERNAL’ HE CHOSE TO SUBJECT HIMSELF TO DEATH THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE.

AND FINALLY IN THE GOSPEL, Jesus, THROUGH THE USE OF PARABLE CHALLENGES THE LEADERS OF HIS DAY, THE PHARISEES, SADDUCEES, AND PRIESTS. HE CHALLENGES THEM TO LOOK AT HOW THEY HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE. THEY WERE THE LEARNED. THEY KNEW THE LAW, THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, THE BETRAYALS FOUND IN THE OLD

TESTAMENT, THE COVENANTS GOD HAD MADE AND RE-MADE WITH ISRAEL. AND YET THEY HAD LITTLE COMPASSION TOWARDS PEOPLE, WHO WHILE TRYING TO LIVE AS GOOD LIFE KEPT SLIPPING BACK INTO SIN. THEIR LACK OF COMPASSION, THEIR SENSE OF RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT, AND THEIR POWER MADE THEM BOTH BLIND AND DEAF TO THE TRUTH Jesus CAME TO PREACH. THEY KEPT TRYING TO CATCH HIM UP, CATCH HIM IN A MISTAKE. THEY WERE NOT INTERESTED IN THE TRUTH OR CHANGING. THEY JUST WANTED THE STATUS QUO AND TO MAINTAIN THAT THEY TAKE JESUS DOWN TO THE LOWEST LEVEL. THEY KNEW MANY THINGS, BUT WERE IGNORANT TO THE TRUTH RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM.

HOWEVER, THE TAX COLLECTORS AND THE PROSTITUTES, KNEW THEY WERE SINNERS. PERHAPS THEY EVEN HAD GIVEN UP ANY HOPE OF BEING SAVED. THEY KNEW THEY WERE ON THE OUTSIDE OF THEIR SOCIETY AND NOBODY WAS INVITING THEM IN. THEY SAW THE HYPOCRISY OF THE PHARISEES BUT THEY SAW NO OTHER CHOICE OF HOW TO LIVE. AND THEN Jesus CAME. HIS MESSAGE WAS NOT SO DIFFERENT THAN OTHERS THAT HAD COME BEFORE HIM, BUT AS THE GOSPELS TELL US “HE SPOKE WITH AN AUTHORITY UNLIKE NO OTHER THEY HAD EVER HEARD.” IT WAS THAT AUTHORITY THAT CAPTURED THEIR INTEREST FINALLY AND MADE THEM LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE HE CAME TO BRING. Jesus SPOKE OF HOPE OF ANOTHER CHOICE THEY COULD MAKE AND THEY BELIEVED HIM AND FOLLOWED HIM.

THINK BACK NOW ON YOUR LIVES FOR FEW MINUTES. THINK OF THE CHOICES YOU HAD TO MAKE AS A CHILD, AN ADULT, AN OLDER PERSON.

AS A CHILD EMPHASIS WAS PERHAPS MORE ON BELONGING OR BEING PART OF THE “RIGHT” GROUP, MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES ABOUT THE FRIENDS YOU MADE, THE CLOTHES YOU WORE. PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHOICE AS YOU GREW THROUGH CHILDHOOD INTO

ADOLESCENCE WAS WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR LIFE, GO WORK AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, GO TO COLLEGE, GO INTO THE SERVICE.

THEN AS YOU MOVED INTO ADULTHOOD YOUR FOCUS CONTINUED ON WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR LIFE, WHAT KIND OF WORK ETC. BUT THEN IT BEGAN TO BROADEN A BIT TO INCLUDE WHO WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR LIFE WITH- THIS WOMAN, THIS MAN, THIS CAREER, THIS VOCATION???? MAKING THAT RIGHT DECISION WAS SO ALL IMPORTANT, WASN'T IT?

AS YOU MOVED THROUGH ADULTHOOD LATE TWENTIES, THIRTIES YOU HAD THE CHOICES ABOUT WHERE YOU WOULD LIVE, WHAT KIND OF JOB YOU WOULD NEED THAT WOULD ENABLE TO GET AHEAD.? WHAT SHOULD ACQUIRE TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF WITH—CARS, MONEY, HOMES, ASSOCIATES?

PERHAPS SOME OF THE EARLIER CHOICES YOU MADE WERE SEEN AS ERRORS. MAYBE SOME OF THE CHOICES IN TERMS OF LIFE PARTNERS, LIFE CAREERS FAILED AND DISAPPOINTED YOU.

THEN AS YOU GREW OLDER PERHAPS INTO YOUR FORTIES AND FIFTIES MAY BE EVEN EARLY SIXTIES PERHAPS YOU WONDERED NOT SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD OR SHOULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED, BUT FOR WHAT WOULD PEOPLE REMEMBER YOU? WHAT LASTING GIFTS COULD YOU BEQUEATH?

BESIDES THE CHOICES WE MAKE AS INDIVIDUALS, THERE ARE THE CHOICES WE MAKE AS GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES. THE CHOICES WE MAKE AT THE BALLOT BOXES THAT DEFINE NOT ONLY THE PEOPLE WHO WILL LEAD US, BUT ALSO THE MORAL FABRIC UNDER WHICH WE WILL LIVE OUT OUR LIVES. SOMETIMES THOSE CHOICES ARE MADE ON THE BASIS ON

THE MOST GOOD FOR THE MOST PEOPLE AND OTHER TIMES THOSE CHOICES LOOK LIKE THEY WERE MADE ON THE BASIS OF THE BEST OPTIONS FOR THE FEW.

EVEN IN THE AREAS OF ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS CHURCH, THERE ARE STRONG INFLUENCES WHICH DETERMINE DIRECTIONS FOR WHOLE GROUPS OF PEOPLE. WE ARE A CHURCH OF CONSERVATIVES, A CHURCH OF LIBERALS, AND ALL THE SHADES IN BETWEEN. SOMETIMES I WONDER IF Jesus WERE TO COME AMONG US IN HIS HUMAN FORM TODAY, HOW WOULD WE LABEL HIM. SOMETIMES AS CHURCH, AND HERE I AM SPEAKING OF BOTH HIERARCHY AND LAITY, BECAUSE YOU NEED BOTH TO FORM THE PEOPLE OF GOD. SOMETIMES THOSE CHOICES ARE ABOUT OPENING OURSELVES UP TO THE WORLD, AS SCARY AS THAT MAY FEEL, AND INVITING THAT WORLD TO BE ONE WITH US, EVEN WHEN THAT MEANS WE WILL HAVE TO CHANGE OUR WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS, THE WAY WE DO THINGS. SOMETIMES WE AS CHURCH HAVE MADE CHOICES THAT ARE ABOUT CLOSING OURSELVES IN AND SHUTTING OUT PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT, PEOPLE WHO WE MAY JUDGE TO BE THE "SINNERS." LIKE THE SCENE IN TODAY'S GOSPEL.

AND FINALLY THERE ARE THE DEEP PERSONAL FAITH CHOICES WE HAVE TO MAKE. CHOICES LIKE, IF I AM A CHRISTIAN, A TRUE DISCIPLE OF Jesus CHRIST, HOW DOES MY FAITH IN GOD IMPACT THE CHOICES OF HOW I WILL LIVE MY LIFE? HOW DOES IT IMPACT THE VALUES THAT I WILL HOLD DEAR, SO DEAR THAT I WOULD BE WILLING TO RISK EVERYTHING, EVEN DEATH, RATHER THAN COMPRISE THEM. SOMETIMES IN THIS LATER AREA WE MAKE MISTAKES, SOME BIG, SOME SMALL. Jesus KNEW WE WOULD. HE WASN'T LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO WERE PERFECT. NO, HE WAS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO WERE WILLING TO MAKE CHOICES, TO FAIL AT TIMES, BUT WHO ALSO ARE WILLING TO GET UP AND MAKE A NEW CHOICE.

AS ONE COMMENTATOR WRITING ON TODAY’S GOSPEL WROTE: “ Jesus ADDRESSES THE PERENNIAL FICKLENESS OF THE HUMAN HEART, WHICH OFTEN REACTS IMPULSIVELY RATHER THAN THOUGHTFULLY TO GOD’S CHALLENGES. AND INITIAL “NO” CAN BECOME A “YES,” IF GRACE IS ALLOWED TO ENLIGHTEN HUMAN REASON, A QUICK UNREASONED “YES” CAN BECOME A “NO” AS IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN A LIFELONG COMMITMENT OF FAITH IN GOD AND IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.

IN OUR READINGS, OUR MUSIC, AND THE WORDS OF OUR LITURGY WE ARE INVITED TODAY TO THINK ABOUT THE CHOICES WE HAVE MADE IN OUR LIVES, THE GOOD ONES AND THE BAD ONES. AND WE ARE INVITED TO BELIEVE THAT NO MATER WHAT HAS HAPPENED, NO MATTER WHAT ROADS WE HAVE CHOSEN TO FOLLOW OR NOT FOLLOW, THAT THERE IS A GOD WHO WALKS WITH US WAITING FOR OUR “NO” TO BECOME A “YES”

LET OUR PRAYER TODAY ECHO THE WORDS OF THE PSALMIST IN OUR RESPONSORIAL PSALM THIS MORNING- “YOUR WAYS, O LORD, MAKE KNOWN TO ME; TEACH ME YOUR PATHS, GUIDE ME IN YOUR TRUTH AND TEACH ME, FOR YOU ARE GOD, MY SAVIOR.THE SINS OF MY YOUTH AND MY FRAILTIES REMEMBER NOT; IN YOUR KINDNESS REMEMBER ME BECAUSE OF YOUR GOODNESS, O LORD.”