

I do not know if any of you have had the experience of locking your keys in the car or in your home before, but it is not a particularly pleasant one. Modern technology has almost made it a thing of the past, with key pads and fobs. Typically, I realized my mistake in the very moment and even reached to grab the door, but was a split second too late. Julius Caesar's words crossing the Rubicon came to mind- *Alea iacta est.*¹ The die is cast...it was too late.

In our second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, an amazing phrase is used, whereby Saint Paul tells the people of Rome that the call of God to them is irrevocable. It is too late; God is not going to reverse His call. So too are the gifts of God...they are not being called back. There are times in which we must make a final decision, from which there is no turning back. When you hit the send button on the computer, there is a sense of finality about it.

But it can also happen that initial fervor in the faith wears off, and we are left wondering how to evaluate it. The convert's enthusiasm wanes a bit, the flame of love may seem to be flickering in a marriage, or the zeal of ministry may appear to be diminishing for a priest or religious. But these realities might also represent a necessary maturing of the virtue tested over time. Something that is irrevocable is something that is unable to be repealed or annulled. This finality can be intimidating, but it is also quite liberating.

I have received some interesting questions over the years as a priest, many of them from young people. They usually make me think. "What if when you die, you found out that all that you believed in

¹ Once someone crosses the River Rubicon, he's in Roman territory. This phrase was attributed to Julius Caesar by Suetonius (121 A.D.) in his *Vita Divi Luli*, paragraph 33

was wrong?" I responded, "I reject the premise of your question."
"C'mon, Father just answer the question." Fair enough.
So I responded: "I have made my choice. I am not turning back.
Though I have no reason to believe that what you propose is the
case, I am happy with my choice." Of course, this is different than
saying I have no struggles or difficulties in living a life of faith. But
a fundamental aspect of the life of faith is that it is lived as a
commitment. We do not simply turn back when things get tough.

On at least three occasions growing up, I tried to quit my swimming
lessons. But my parents just signed me up the next time around
until I got the message that I was going to learn how to swim. And
we finished activities we started, even if we eventually decided to
discontinue them the following year- we honored the commitment
we had made. Commitment was not allowed to take a backseat to
expediency. We cannot change the rules of the game just because we
do not like the score.

Compare this to the attitude of the Canaanite woman in today's
Gospel. She cries out, "Lord, help me," but when rebuffed by the
apostles, continues in perseverance. She was always respectful and
polite, and in the end her persistence finally won her a hearing.
God's love will have no end; He is not taking back the offer because
by His crucifixion, death and resurrection, he has won for us our
redemption, paving the way for our salvation.

So when we say that God's call is irrevocable, it has a particular
meaning. Church teaching has been clear on this point: "The Jewish
faith...is already a response to God's revelation in the Old
Covenant...for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."² God
remains faithful to our ancestors in faith, the Jewish people who
were "the first to hear the Word of God."

² Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph # 839

Sadly, “forever” has become a very scary word for many, many people. They question its very relevance in the 21st century. Or else, if not that, others question how God’s forgiveness can take hold, question if they really have in fact been forgiven. This is a similar error– understandable given our weak human natures, but at its core it too seems to deny the effectiveness of God’s working in our lives. His love is definitive, all encompassing, and He is not pulling back that love. We may pull away, but He will not.

In faith, we are invited to see that the notion of “forever” is at its core an invitation to deeper faith in God Who loves us unconditionally. Let none of us to doubt this total commitment by God to our salvation. He offers His love freely to all; we must accept it in our hearts and live this call by an active life of faith and trust in God. I close with these words from psalm 117:

*“O praise the Lord, all you nations,
acclaim him, all you peoples.
Strong is his love for us,
He is faithful forever.
Alleluia”*