

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

February 16, 2014

Readings: Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:17-37

Choices, choices, choices...If it is with respect to an entrée selection at a restaurant, I tend to stick with what is safe, rather than risking making a choice potentially less rewarding. If I make the wrong choice, at most I have a less than perfect meal. If I am selecting a line at the grocery check out counter, I almost always make the wrong choice, the slower. I no longer worry about which lane I choose on a crowded freeway ramp– No harm, no foul. But other choices in life are much more fundamental. Our first reading gives us some good food for thought on this very point. And our Gospel follows it up with a review of the centrality of the commandments.

Sirach reminds us in our first reading: “Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.” Indeed, we have set before us **life and prosperity, death and doom. We are given the ultimate choice; it is not made for us.**

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote beautifully about our ultimate end. The ultimate end of Man is Happiness: "If we ask what is the good intended in any art or any undertaking, it should be noted that it is that for the sake of which all the other things are done ... So, this ultimate end of man is called the human good, and it is happiness."<sup>1</sup>

And yet, the choices we make now do indeed affect us for the rest of our lives. I recall a reunion many years ago now, as some classmates gathered from high school. It was as if people were re-cast in their roles from 1981. Some were laughing with (or at) one classmate, who appeared completely impaired and some thought it was quite entertaining—just like old times. Over twenty years had passed. Something struck me as being terribly wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> [from *The Pocket Aquinas*, p. 190]

In a similar passage to our first reading, we recall Moses being clearly frustrated with the people. “I led you for forty years in the desert,” he lamented, “but not even at the present day has the Lord yet given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.” Moses was not making excuses for the people—it is because of the hardness of their hearts that these things have not been given to them. Yet, the choice was theirs. Moses was merely laying out the choices more clearly, but ultimately it was not his choice.

At some point we realize that we are primarily responsible for our own happiness. Yes, it is a gift from God, but we must cooperate with the graces he offers to us. Whether Ben Sirach or Moses, the great leaders in the Bible were not afraid to put the question back to the people. You, you must choose. I cannot do it for you. Our choice for God carries with it some key implications.

\*There is a principle beyond myself to which I answer. I am not the be all and end all of my life.

\*I am accountable to someone, not just to my feelings and wants. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want, but true freedom is in doing that which what we ought to do.

\*Our choice for God may pit us against our friends, family or co-workers. Are you willing to risk these conflicts, for they will come?

\*God will never let you down, no matter how low we may feel at times that we have sunk. God’s hand is there to lift us up.

\*When we can look at ourselves in the mirror for more than just a second- realizing that we are treasured beyond comprehension—nothing can substitute for that peace.

As we heard in our Gospel—let our “Yes” mean “Yes.” May we choose God each and every day, and follow wherever He leads us.