

This week we are asked to reflect on our choices

Especially the difficult ones in our lives

We all make choices every moment of every day

Are my choices reflecting my beliefs?

It is easy to say I believe in God

In Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

But do my choices reflect that belief?

It is not easy to be faithful

It is not easy to be a Catholic Christian in the world today

At times, we may even have to die a bit ourselves

Our faith tells us that these sacrifices will be rewarded

Either in this life or in the next

What is our response when our faith is challenged?

When our friends and neighbors ask ‘what’s the point’?

When it might be easier to sleep in on a Sunday morning?

When our friends or job lead us away from God?

Will we abandon our relationship with God for personal autonomy?

For political gain?

For power of one sort or another?

The cross was not easy for Christ, either

Father, save me from this hour

But then, in obedience, he embraces his hour

He surrenders to the Father's will

An act of the heart

An act of the will

He made his choice

He shows us the way through our cross

Not avoiding it

Not escaping it

But through the cross to the resurrection

For Christ, his desire to save us was stronger than death

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies

It remains just a grain of wheat

But if it dies, It produces much fruit

One tiny seed of wheat produces a plant

Eventually an ear

And within the ear is a multitude of seeds

Some of which will become food

But some will be selected to be planted

Some is ground up and mixed with other seeds

Becoming flour and then bread

Some will feed our bodies

Some will become a host and feed our souls

Other seeds will be placed into the ground

Where they will rot

But then they will germinate

And bring new life

The wheat doesn't have a choice

It doesn't have free will

But we do

So where are our choices leading us?

Jeremiah was a prophet to the Israelite nation

A nation that was torn apart bit physically

A northern kingdom and a southern kingdom

But worse this, it is a people that is torn apart spiritually

They have turned their backs on their covenant with God

They were conquered and taken from their homes

Physically enslaved once again because of their infidelity

Spiritually enslaved to sin because of their choices

But the Lord promises a new covenant

He doesn't wait for them to turn back

His promise is made while they are still turned away

This new covenant will not be written on stone tablets

But on their hearts

I will be their God

And they will be my people

God has mercy and compassion on his people

The hope of the future will begin in their everyday life

This covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ

A covenant he chooses to give to His children

We see this in his response to the Greeks

It seems a simple request

We would like to see Jesus

But his response is not so simple

He first announces his hour has come

And he instructs us

Whoever would serve me will follow me

He concludes by speaking of his death

With an invitation for us to follow as well

The path to glory is not easy

It is the cross

I am troubled now

It was not easy for Christ

Did it cause him to lose sleep?

Did it cause him nightmares?

Are we surprised it is not easy for us?

Humiliation, suffering, death: these are not easy

But it was for this purpose I came to this hour

His choice to unite his will with that of the Father

The grace of our salvation is free

But it is not cheap

It is a gift for everyone

But a gift we are free to accept or reject

It is a gift that brings many opportunities

It is a gift that has responsibilities as well

These responsibilities are the choices we make

Choosing to live Catholic Christian lives in our families

Our workplaces, our school, our parish, our city, our nation

We come today to say the same thing the Greeks said

I want to see Jesus

But to see him is not to demand a miracle

It would be nice to experience a healing

But is that what our faith hangs upon?

If we truly want to see Jesus

Ask to see the true Jesus

The Jesus that did not shy away from the cross

The Jesus who did not turn away from suffering

The Jesus that walked through the cross into a new birth

The life of the resurrection

This is the meaning of the Lenten season

If Lent is not a time of new birth

It becomes a shell of faith

It is empty

We can observe a lot of practices

We can be up in adoration all night

We can give up all the candy and TV and alcohol we want

And we can keep a heart of stone

Our faith can become an hour a week we give to God

And all the jealousies, sarcasm, and prejudices remain

A faith of childhood memories about the good old days

But one of little adult commitment

If we forget Lent is about new birth

We can end up with an easy, convenient religion

But we do not come to truly know Jesus

When we die to self during Lent

Our shell is cracked open

When we die to ourselves, we become open to new life

Open to new life in our marriage

Even if we are celebrating 50 years of marriage

Open to new life in children or grandchildren

Open to new possibilities in our jobs

Open to a new direction in my life

We can be open to new life in our parish and our church

It is an opportunity to really embrace Holy Family parish

If Lent is a time of dying to yourself

Our outer shell begins to crack open

The Holy Spirit enters

We begin to sprout new roots

A powerful, new relationship with God gets new life

A relationship that is lived in communion with each other

The old is laid to rest during Lent

And a new life is born on Easter morning

If we make the choice to live Lent in this way

It can never be the same old thing again

Unless the grain of wheat dies, it remains only a grain of wheat

But if it dies, it produces much fruit