

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Joshua 24:1-2.15-18 / John 6:60-69)  
23.08.2015  
*Decision & Memory*

If you go on internet and look for a book whose title is “How to choose?” hundreds of titles will come up ranging from “How to choose a cow?” to “How to choose a sweetheart?”

The huge number of books supposedly written to help us in our decisions makes one very clear point: it is difficult for us to choose.

Maybe we could say that to choose is one of our greatest daily challenges: to choose reminds us that we cannot have everything and that all our longings and desires cannot be satisfied all at once. More deeply maybe the challenge lies in the fact that our decisions at one and the same time reveal who we truly are and shape what we become. Our decisions say something about us and they transform us. We are and we become what our decisions make of us. And here there is no escape, even the one who refuses to make any decisions reveals who he or she is. There is no way out for us, to say yes or to say no or to say nothing speaks volumes and impacts our lives. Another aspect which does not help us in our decision making is that we long for security and certainties and so we prefer simplistic questions with clear-cut answers.

Today in our two readings we see the people of God and Jesus’ disciples confronted with simple questions: who are you going to serve? Do you want to go away? The answers are quite straightforward and do not leave room for a middle way. None of us would have expected Peter to say: “We do not want to go away but we do not want to stay with you either”.

In our lives the important issues rarely present themselves in such a simple way. Most of our big decisions require time and discernment.

Human wisdom and common sense are given to us in order to help us in our decision making. However above all, the Holy Spirit is here to guide us so that, in our lives, all things may be done according to God’s will.

In the extract from the book of Joshua that we have heard, we are told why the people choose to serve the Lord. It is because they remember the active presence of God in their history: “We have no intention of deserting the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled”.

To remember is a crucial aspect of every discernment process and all decision making. Without memory we cannot make the right decisions, without remembrance we cannot go forward.

The same dynamic is at work in St Peter’s answer to Jesus. It is because the apostle treasured Jesus’ words and kept them alive in his heart that he was able, in that instance, to remain faithful to the Lord.

Very often our wrong decisions are rooted in our forgetfulness: we forget who we are in God’s sight, what his promises are and the deeds he has done for us; we forget “the rock from which we were hewn” (Is 51:1) and on which we have built our lives.

What is at stake here is the overall coherence of our human journey. Without memory our decisions run the risk of orientating our lives in ways which are at odds with what we hold dear, with who we claim to be. To remember allows us to be motivated not only by the onrush of present impressions but by most permanent and less immediate priorities. This means seeing each step we take as part of a lifelong journey and not simply as one of a disjointed series of separate steps. Every choice – even the minor ones – should reflect the permanent beliefs and values by which we shape our lives.

The Lord declares himself: “Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls” (Jr 6:16).

As persons and as communities, the memory we must keep alive in order to discern properly the way forward is the memory of our loving relationship with Christ. At the starting point of our lives, we find these precious and saving words addressed to each one of us: “You are my beloved son and daughter; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22).

We do not have to be afraid of failing or of making a mistake, God loves us too much to judge us on only one decision. Let us remember that after committing themselves to serve the Lord and to follow him, the people of God and St Peter betrayed him. The Lord does not look only at the initial burst of enthusiasm, but at the patient, ongoing and perseverant work of conversion to the Gospel. This slow process of transformation of our lives is partly the result of all our decisions, small and great alike.

St Peter urges the first Christians to live in such a way that “God may be glorified in all things” (1P 4:11). And we know that, according to St Irenaeus, “the glory of God is man fully alive” (*Adv. IV*, 20, 7).

Unfortunately, not all our decisions are motivated by the great goal proposed to us in Jesus Christ, which is to glorify God in our lives. We sometimes make decisions based on the desire of keeping up appearances, or based on the short memory of a glorious past when we were in control and had the power, or based on the hurt memory of infected wounds that have festered, or on the distorted memory of events which have been repeated from one generation to the next without been corrected.

We need the Holy Spirit to purify our memories again and again so that in our communities and families we may remember correctly and truly, in a life-giving way. Then we will be able to choose what is good, what contributes to make the world a better place.

Pope Francis reminds us that the Lord “never abandons his people, for on that day of sin, of the first sin, he made a decision; he made a choice, to make history with his people. God, who has no history since he is eternal wanted to make history, to walk close to his people” (Morning Meditation, 24.09.2013).

As God chose to walk with us may we choose to walk with him and with one another in love.