

Homily 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (26.8.18)

"If you will not serve the Lord,
choose today whom you wish to serve"

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Joshua's words to the people. And the important word there, I think, is "choice," that our faith allows free choice. The ability to choose is the power rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or to do that, to shape our lives for better or for worse. We call it "free will," of course. But that's the important thing that the church teaches in the catechism, that choosing is very much different from reacting to feelings. And it uses those two big words, "reason" and "will." And reason is the ability to weigh up, if you like, the pros and cons, the rights and wrongs of a situation or a decision or whatever. But the will is a deep act inside to force one's heart to take a stance, a determination despite fear or difficulties or threats to make a strong decision, that no matter how I feel about this, I will, hence the word "will," do what is right. And this ability or human freedom is a force, of course, very much about growth and maturity and truth and goodness. And it's a unique faculty that only us humans possess. And in the Book of Genesis, of course, it says very clearly, that as man is made in the image and likeness of God, this is one of the very things in which we are imaged and liked to God.

And so I think today is very much about looking at free will and human choice. Because freedom always allows us to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. And God allows us so much freedom that Jesus himself says to the inner core of his group of 12, "What about you? Do you want to go away, too?" He gives them that choice, when these other disciples have left him.

Now, choice is a powerful thing and it's a moral thing, and it's a deeply profound thing that the church has always taught, is something we must give attention to in our life of faith. Because you could say it's a fact, I don't like

using that word fact, but it is a fact, that the more one chooses what is right, proper, good, and true, the irony is, the more free you become. Because you liberate yourself from inordinate, egotistical desires. It shapes character. It creates a good habit, because we're creatures of habit, and we get into habits. But if we're formed with this virtue, then we actually develop choosing as a good habit. And there's a double irony in that, because the more one chooses the dark side of a negative, or the evil, or sinful, whichever way you see it, the more one becomes a slave, a slave to things. They control you more than you controlling them.

Now I know that a person can be impeded in freedom... And our faith as well as state law, quite rightly, says that freedom can be curtailed by all sorts of situations: ignorance, duress, fear, or even psychological and social circumstances. But in discussing freedom I am not talking about people who are impeded by such forces; I'm talking about the normal thing that all of us are gifted with in the gift of freedom.

So freedom manifests itself above all in relationships with others, and is affected by the company we keep, or the way we react to others. And of course, our choices are affected. Our moral choices are affected by the company we keep in such relationships. And we get to the core, don't we, in today's gospel?

"What about you? Do you want to go away, too?"

Simon Peter answered,

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life."

And that was a good choice.