

Homily
6th Sunday in OT / A / 2017
Msgr. Patrick S. Brennan

Next Sunday is Commitment Sunday for the Archbishop's Catholic Appeal. Whether we give to the appeal or not is a choice—one of the many choices that all of us make each day.

Our readings today also deal with choices: which path will I choose in life, what choices will I make to form my life, what decisions will I make to establish my character, what kind of person will I choose to be. They are all choices.

Our first reading today is all about choices—from the Book of Sirach, a part of the “wisdom” books of the Bible. We don't know much about the author—probably it was written about 200 BC by a sage, a wise man in Jerusalem. But one thing we do know: Sirach was immersed in the Law, the Torah. As our Responsorial Psalm today sums it up: “Blessed—or ‘happy’—are they who follow the law of the Lord.”

In our present culture and society, it is hard for us to understand Israel's love of the Law. We don't generally find law “loveable.” For contemporary society, law is usually seen as a limit on our freedom. We want to be free! We want to make our own choices—free from the law. Law is a kind of necessary evil. We live with it, but we don't “love” it.

It was altogether different in ancient Israel. The Law was God's gift to his chosen people. Law was the path to right relationship, with God, and with each other. Law did not inhibit freedom; Law was the foundation of freedom.

And the reasoning is this: 1) God wants to share his life with us; and 2) God's life is love; and 3) love is a personal choice, a matter of the will—one can't be coerced to love; so 4) God helps us to make the right choice; and 5) that help is called the Law; so 6) we can choose the righteous path; and 7) be with God forever.

Look at Sirach: “If you *choose* you can keep the commandments; they will save you.” If we follow the law of the Lord—if we love as God loves—then one day we will be with God, who is love.

Of course, we have a free will. We can *choose* good or we can *choose* evil. Sirach: “He has set before you fire and water; to whichever you *choose*, stretch forth your hand.” You can choose either one. “Before man are life and death, good and evil. Whichever he chooses shall be given him.”

But we don’t always know what to choose. This is where the Law (or the Church) comes in: it helps us! Even then, we still make the wrong choice.

This past week we have been reading from the Book of Genesis. God places Adam and Eve in the garden, and he gives them everything they need. But he forbids them to eat of one tree—the “Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.” He tells them that they will die if they eat from it. So what do they do? They eat from it. Are we surprised at the outcome?

Freedom, and choice, are foundational principles in our lives. Moral philosophers tell us that free acts always accomplish two things: 1) first, they determine what I will do in a particular situation, in a particular moment; and 2) second, they contribute in a bigger way to who I am and what I become. The little choices I make each day eventually make me the person I am.

So what kind of person do we want to be? And what choices will we make to get there? “I set before you life and death. Therefore, choose life.”

Next week is commitment Sunday for the Archbishop’s Catholic Appeal. I have made my choice already—you may also have received your commitment card in the mail in the last couple of weeks. For those who haven’t yet made a commitment, think about your choice. And choose life.