

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

7 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“What Do You Want To Do?”

What do you really care about? What is so important to you that you will get up out of your chair, switch off the television, take a complete day off work and go actively voice your opinion, exercise your rights or demonstrate your commitment?

The question is one that confronts Abraham in today's first reading from Genesis Chapter 22. The story of the sacrifice of Isaac shocks and horrifies all of us. The later fact that Isaac turns out to be the least interesting of the Fathers of Israel, in no way mitigates our distain for this story, it still horrifies us and provides shock.

That is precisely what it is meant to do. It is meant to take us to the edge, like any good horror story and ask us: “So, what are you going to do? Disobey God or kill your child”

At the time of writing many Jews in Israel were faced with the same dilemma. As thousands crossed over to the Fertility Religion of the Canaanites they too had to make a choice. “Will you let your crops rot in the fields or sacrifice a baby to the Harvest God, Baal?

It man seem to us today, as an easy and obvious choice. But remember how hard it must have been for simple peasant people to go against the flow.

Even today, with attractive advertising promotion and political spin; we ourselves find it difficult to make good choices. Do you believe everything that Anne Culter says that the Democratic Party belongs to the church of liberalism, whose course is to destroy the moral fiber of our nation? Or do you really believe the Republicans are a right wing party of the rich, who want the rich to become richer and care nothing for the have-nots?

Invite Anne Culter and Hilary Clinton to debate the issue and you can guarantee the cat fight of all cat fights. Politics and moral issues always generate lots of heat. But can you remember in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus turns to Peter and says: “But you, what do you believe?”

When we face the question what do we care about? What makes us get up out of the chair? It is also an enormously personal question. Spouses, children, family usually come first, but we know that we cannot care for them or protect them unless certain things are in place in our society.

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We worry about jobs, because we see the possibility of their futures being eroded. Abraham worried about his future and that of his people and God tells him: “Abraham where do you place your trust? Do you not believe that I am looking out for your welfare?”

We too live in precarious times and we too worry about the future and particularly for our children. We know that our faith tells us: “Put your trust in God, believe not in a doubtful way but believe in a trusting way that the God of love, the creator of the smallest wonder, will care and provide for you.

I think we all need a ‘pick me up’ of faith in hard times. Rather than complain at the price of gas, the housing market or the index falling, we love to hear of the grace, compassion and love of neighbors and fellow citizens who look out for those in a worse state than themselves and exercise their faith in a real and practical way.

Paul writing to the Romans writes to a Roman population that is two thirds slave. The prospect of freedom and the ideals of Christ have a great appeal for them and give them hope. Paul tells them that because of their faith they have now a greater freedom, a freedom to make the right choices in all that is truly important to them.

For Paul as for many of the Christian writers there are two worlds, the world of power, greed and nations and then there is the world of God’s Kingdom, his Justice, his Love and his Rule. Christ has opened the door and allowed God’s Kingdom to come bursting through. Now men and women have a choice. It is the choice between good and evil, things that last and things that don’t last. It is the choice between true freedom and being chained and weighed down by the consequences of your own failure and bad choices.

What do you want to do? We ask our children? Do you want to have fun now and pay later? Do you want to work now and benefit later?

Religion like politics is about choices: Paul is bent on telling his Christians: “You can give yourself more freedom if you choose Christ because you will carry no baggage and Christ will truly set you free.”

Two hundred and thirty two years ago John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and the other delegates of the Philadelphia Congress put their names to the Declaration of American Independence. We celebrate that action this Friday. In one document they made freedom and liberty holy words forever enshrined and honored in the hearts and minds of this nation. We do well to celebrate that declaration.

“So, what are you going to do?” asks the Gospel. “Are you going to celebrate this new found freedom? What are you going to do with the freedom Christ has given you?” asks Paul. When we look to Jesus in the Gospel lesson, he says “Give it away. Give the

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freedom that I have given to you, to those who truly need it. I have given you the freedom and capacity to love, give that gift to other. Let not your following of me be about your own gain, but rather use it to free others and give them a taste of God's Kingdom. If you have two shirts, give away one, to who needs it. If you have forgiveness in your heart, teach it to someone else.

Reflecting on this, don't get the feeling that Christianity and the Gospel is awfully like pyramid selling or networking? That is because the Gospel itself is an activity. Jesus tells his disciples more than "Believe!" He commands them and tells them: "Go! Teach! Welcome! Proclaim!"

Such a Gospel never reaches the ears of the listener without that listener taking long looks at the face of the one speaking it. Whether it reaches in and touches a heart depends so much on whether the listener sees and hears that the words spoken are truly believed.

As we celebrate our national day this week, let us pray that we too can make our own declaration. It is the declaration that through our lives we can and do inspire others to choose the true freedom that Christ offers, and that in choosing the Gospel all love may continue to grow.

Amen+

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