

Today is all about priorities and choices. What is important in our lives, the often unasked question of why it is important in our lives, and finally are the choices that we make ultimately going to support, or get in the way of our priorities?

The argument in our reading from the Book of Wisdom that we read today asks 'who can know the mind of God?' Who can know his intentions? Can we have direct knowledge of his plans for us and for our world? Of course the answer is no one knows and no we can't, but that hasn't stopped people through out history and even today from laying claim to that knowledge.

What we do know of God is what he has told us through the Apostles, and from that we can draw some conclusions that give us some boundaries and a direction for our lives. By in large, we don't particularly like this aspect of our relationship with God. We rail against having limitations placed upon our persons. We want to believe that everyone can do everything, even if we admit it isn't true.

Years ago, a pastor of this church Fr. Phillip Leach made a profound statement in one of his homilies. He said that our limitations are a gift, a gift that gives us freedom. Our first reaction to that statement usually is, 'you've got to be kidding!' Why would anyone want limits on their abilities? Why would we want limits on our behaviors?

We want limitations because limitations help us focus, and provide the basis for discipleship. Let me give you an example. I for one would never try to be a translator for any other language to English. It took almost 20 years to be able to order my favorite dish off the menu at Mi Casita without pointing at the menu. But I do have other gifts and my limitation in foreign language has given me the freedom to focus on those areas where I can excel. It is the same for all of us; our limitations help to teach us the basics of self-discipline.

That basic self-discipline of not being able to do everything, as frustrating as it may be, is a building block for the discipline we need to become Disciples of Christ. But in order to become Disciples, we need to make some seemingly difficult choices.

In today's Gospel, Our Lord says; "If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes even his own life, he

cannot be my disciple.” Harsh words that seem to contradict the rest of the Gospel that is focused on the necessity of loving all of those very same people, plus strangers, and even our enemies. It seems to be confusing, until we examine the words in the context of the culture where Jesus lived and translate the meaning into our own time and culture.

Let me restate the verse in language appropriate to our time and place. ‘If anyone comes to me without loving their father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes even their own life, less than me, they cannot be my disciple.’ Let me restate the verse again and bring it closer to the context of our society outside the family. ‘If anyone comes to me without loving their job, career, friends, party time, home, car, property, pets, everything they enjoy, everything that gives them pleasure less than me, they cannot be my disciple.’

It makes you sit back and think doesn’t it? I had to when writing this homily. Jesus isn’t telling us that we have to have a loveless life, that we can’t enjoy ourselves with our family and friends, that we can’t have a hobby or go to parties, that we can’t have a nice house. Jesus is telling us that all of our earthly relationships, all of our earthly pursuits, all of our property, all of our earthly desires are secondary. Nothing is more important than loving him.

In order to be a Disciple of Christ, our first love must be Jesus. Our first desire must be to come as close to with Jesus as humanly possible while on earth. The primary focus of our life must be to be one with Jesus in heaven. Nothing less will do, nothing less will be accepted. What does this level of commitment mean in our lives? Let’s start with our interpersonal relationships.

We need to love Jesus more than we love our spouse. When I first realized this requirement, my initial reaction was ‘Back off! Nobody comes between my wife and I, no one!’ Once I calmed down I thought about it. I thought about how I came to know that God loves me, it was through the love that my wife has for me and I for her. Then I thought about just who it was that gave me the gift of my wife, and how much that person must love me to give me such a wonderful, life-changing gift.

It dawned on me that with all of the other meaningful gifts in my life, my relationship with the giver of the gift was and is always more important than the gift. Therefore, my relationship with God should be more important than my relationship with my wife. What about my relationship with Jesus

interfering with and diminishing my relationship with my wife? After all in any earthly relationship, putting a friend, work, hobby, even children before my wife would diminish my relationship with my wife.

When we put God first in a relationship, any relationship, but in a very special sense the marriage relationship, the relationship becomes much greater than the sum of its parts here on earth. In other words, putting God, loving God first in our marriage has enhanced every aspect of our marriage, bar none. Just as putting God first in all other relationships enhances them as well.

What about the hard times? When the family is living on a mix of mac and cheese, hotdogs and beans; the times of problems at work, and conflicts within the family? How about the times when someone in the family dies, particularly when a child dies before the parents? Where is God then?

There are more ways to give up our life to God than by martyrdom. Giving up our very lives to God also means giving up our troubles, our conflicts our sorrows to God. We can't abdicate our responsibility for working through the issue of the day, roll over in bed and just declare that we are trusting in God. We are responsible for standing on the rock, on the shoulders of Peter and the other Apostles and putting our shoulders to the wheel of life to try to solve our problems. But we do that knowing that Jesus is there with us supporting us throughout our struggles.

Now before we start to complain about the hard times, the times when we must pick up our cross, think about this. When did a football team get better by playing in games they could easily win? When in our own lives did we ever grow, physically, mentally or spiritually without a struggle? The answer is never. Growth, becoming better at anything always involves struggle.

It also means giving up our joys and successes to Jesus as well. It means living in accordance to his word, to his commandments and doing it not out of fear, but because we love him and don't want our behavior to disappoint him.

Which brings us back to where we started. We do know where God wants us to be and how to get there because Jesus and the Apostles have given us that information through the teaching authority of the Church. We know the choices we have to make in order to spend eternity in heaven.

The question that remains is do we have the courage and self discipline to make living that choice, the choice to put Jesus first as the overriding priority in our lives? Or are other distractions more important? It is only one choice, one decision, but it is a choice and a decision we need to make each and every day of our lives.