**“Making Choices”**

All our readings point us to the word Choices. God created us with freewill so we can make choices every day of our lives. To make it easy for us to make the right choices that leads us to God, because God desires us to be with Him, He gave us two simple commandments of love written in our hearts so we can easily remember. However, sometimes or most of the time, the choices we make drive us away from God and they keep us from being holy. What really stands in our way are the world, the flesh, and the tempter or the evil one who desires to make us sin against God so we can lose the free gift of sanctifying grace God wants to pour on us and then, spend eternity in Hell with him.

The way the devil distract us from following God is by lying to us that God does not love us. That God is not our Father who cares about us. That we have been abandoned by God and he the devil is the one who can set us free from our overbearing God who wants us to be miserable. The devil dangles the things that God created for us to give God the glory and tells us to use them to please ourselves, which in the end will lead us to an unfulfilled life. When he sets the bait, and we take a bite, we fall into his trap, our lives will be full of trials and tribulations that further drives us away from God, the source of all goodness, happiness, peace, and joy. It is up to us to make a choice between good and evil.

God calls us to focus on Him and reject the snares of the evil one. He tells us that by the passion, death, and resurrection of His Son, He has poured down His grace upon us through the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, when we strive for righteousness, the world would ridicule and mock us. To please the world, we might gravitate towards what the world wants us to do for their praise. Eventually, because of the abuse and ridicule we get from the world, we return within ourselves and clink more intensely to God within us. God desires that we look within ourselves for Him and not look outside at the world, the flesh, and the devil. God desires that we put all our hope in Him. It is up to us to make a choice between good and evil.

God desires that we move closer to Him and turn away from the desire for human popularity. Pouring ourselves in prayer to God, He will refine us with a more perfect purity to cling to Him in love of Him and in love of our neighbor for His sake. For some of us, it is when we are despised by the world, that we will come to know who we should look to, as witness of our actions. It is then we should strengthen ourselves with prayer and fix our gaze on the one who listens from on high. Then, we will love the truth and avoid what is false. Our tendency will be to do what is right without looking for a reward and be more willing to put up with evil than to perpetrate it. And to consider any insult as gain for the sake of truth.

In our first reading, from the Book of Genesis, we heard about the second creation story, with God forming human from clay and breathing life into them. Then, God gave human beings a special power that puts them above every other creation. This awesome power is freedom. It is a beautiful power, but yet dangerous if not used according to God’s desire for us. The power make us more like God, and yet if misused, we can separate ourselves from God. Although we have instinct like other animals with our freedom, we have the ability to choose. For example, a hungry animal when it sees food, will have to eat, while we humans though, we might be hungry, for whatever reason might choose not to eat. In our story, our freedom was put to the test by the evil one.

This story is really a tragic one. It is a story that presents the origin of original sin into the world. It is a story of disobedience in the face of temptation to use our freedom. Adam and Eve at the suggestion of the evil one, wanted to put themselves in the place of God. Their action led to a completely different outcome. Instead of becoming divine, they fell from divine favor and were separated from God. They were not satisfied with what the Author of all Wisdom had given them, they wanted more rather than be satisfied with what God had given them, even after they had been told more would lead to death. They went from very good at their creation, to very evil after their disobedience.

The human body is wonderfully made and an object of beauty. The immediate effect of Adam and Eve’s disobedience was, their eyes were now able to see their nakedness, so they knew shame; because they could now objectify each other. They realized that their nakedness could be dangerous for their goodness, so, they covered themselves up with leaves. The culture of the Semitic ancient Near Eastern culture frowned on human nakedness. To a degree, it is unacceptable to see men and women violating modesty in that part of the world. Arabs usually find Western styles of clothing offensive. Our faith gives us the proper sense of values. It teaches us that happiness and fulfillment are found only in God and in doing His will.

In our second reading, St. Paul in his letter to the Romans gave us a picture of the effects of sin and the joy of redemption. Sin came into the world by the disobedience of our first parents in choosing to do evil rather than obey the commandment of God. Their sin, negatively affected all of creation. On the other hand, Jesus used the freedom of His human nature to do good by dying for us on the cross for our redemption. Because of Jesus’ obedience, all of us are restored to a more beautify friendship with God. Now instead of being in the Garden of Eden for eternity, by the action of Jesus, we will be in heaven with God and the Angels.

As Jesus our redeemer is greater than any person, so is the restoration He brought, greater good than the hugely effect of sin; which is even greater than our first state of sinlessness. To be redeemed by Jesus the Christ, He Himself should be a source of immense joy for us. God so loved us that He sent His own Son to transform us and repair sin. God our Father has glorified His Son with the glory He had before, and He is proud of us His redeemed children. In us, He sees His only begotten Son and the handiwork of His power and love. We on our own, must refrain from being prideful, pride belongs to God because He has accomplished all the good that is within us.

In our Gospel reading, we heard that Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. In contrast Adam and Eve were placed in the garden. Just as Eve and Adam were tested with food by the devil, so did the devil’s first test Jesus underwent after fasting for 40 days and nights was about food. This signifies the beginning of the reverse of the fall of Adam and Eve. However, the temptation presented by the devil to Adam and Eve was in the presence of plenty of food in the garden. While in the desert, food would have been limited. So Jesus’ test was a lot harder than Adam and Eve’s. They all had to make a choice to listen to the devil or to follow God’s will.

With Jesus not falling for the devil’s trick the first time, the devil continued to test Jesus two more times. The next test had to do with pride. The devil wanted Jesus to jump off the parapet of the Temple. The third test was about greed. That the devil would give Jesus the whole world if He worships the devil. Each test was started by the devil asking Jesus, if you are the son of God. Just like the devil will do to all of us, he wanted Jesus to doubt that He is the beloved Son of God. He does the same to us to trick us to commit sin. He asks us, do you trust that you are beloved by God? Just as Jesus defeated the devil by quoting Scripture, so do we need to know Scripture to defeat the devil.

As we come with utmost reverence to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Jesu to give us more wisdom to always choose according to our heavenly Father’s will.