

Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

6. Choosing

Introduction

Following the Lord and keeping close to him in love was the theme of our last chapter. Anyone who takes following Christ seriously soon discovers that there are choices to be made; choices about how we are to grow in our relationship with God and choices about how God calls us to follow each and every day. Our spirituality helps us discern how to make those choices wisely.



Way-In

Here are some pictures which show people making a choice. Notice some of these show “big” choices and some appear to be less so. We make choices each day, some are relatively minor (what to wear, what to have for a meal this evening etc). Some choices can radically effect

our way of life. For instance deciding about how to react to someone who has hurt us deeply, should we hold a grudge and ignore them or to try and re-engage with them?

Reflect-&-Jot



Take time to think about some of the choices you have made in your own life. You might like to make a list of the big ones. Some you may wish to rejoice over in which case take a moment to thank God. Perhaps you regret some of them. If you do, resist the temptation to pass harsh judgement on yourself. Just quietly offer them to God. Record your conversation with the Lord in some way.

Inside-The-Text

Here is the final part of our chapter from St John's Gospel. Peter has been told by Jesus that he is to feed the sheep and to follow him. Here is what happens next.

Peter turned round and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' (John 21:20-22)

So far the conversation between Peter and Jesus has been the intimate dialogue between the two of them. Now a third person, the one we call the beloved disciple, is indirectly involved. The conversation continues but that close back and forth dialogue seems to have taken a different turn.

Reflect-&-Jot



Read the Gospel passage again. Jot down what you make of it.

Digging-Deeper

Turning away and turning back The first thing we can note occurs in the first two words, "Peter turned". He turns round and sees someone other than Jesus. In so doing he knows Jesus is still there and the conversation is still going on but his attention shifts somewhere else and, as a result, he takes his eyes off the Lord. Just when he should be thinking about what it will mean to follow his Lord in the future he is asking a question about the future of someone else! Of course, we may be doing Peter a disservice and his question about the future of the other disciple may be one of genuine concern, but nevertheless keeping the focus on Christ is the principle foundation of our spirituality.

Discerning the will of God The future for this beloved disciple does seem to worry Peter. Perhaps it is a normal human reaction to want to know or to worry about someone else's fate, especially as Peter has just heard about his own. But Jesus turns the attention away from this and back to the task in hand. He talks about his will. ("If it is my will that he remain until I come what is that to you. Follow me.") Peter is to concentrate on following God's will in his own life, not on that of another. One of the most important elements of spirituality is how it enables us to discern what God's will is for ourselves.

Reflect-&-Jot

Think about a time when you have turned away from God and then turned back. What difference has that experience made to you since?

- If you are a visual sort of person choose a colour which expresses turning away and one which expresses turning back.
- Find some photographs or write a paragraph or two which express where and when you have discovered God at work in your life (God's will for you) in the past.

Making good choices

- Keep it simple. At the root of our spirituality we try to keep before us the desire to live a life in the footsteps of Christ and that lies at the heart of all our choices. So we can ask ourselves "If I choose this path will it lead me closer to Christ or not?"
- Look at the choices others have made. We can consider what choices people in the past have made, especially if they have been in a similar situation to our own. Sometimes we will find the experience of such people recorded in the pages of our Scriptures and sometimes in the lives of the saints. So we can ask ourselves "What light does their experience shed on my own? Do they offer me clues about what direction to take or what option to choose?"
- Choices are made within a context not in the abstract. Usually there are many different factors which come into play. Collect all the necessary information and take a hard headed look at concrete demands of the present situation. So we can ask ourselves "What are the demands of the current situation, the people and the context I am in?"
- We can think about the effects on those around us. We have to take into account our responsibilities and commitments to others. They have to be part of the reckoning too. God wants us to use our common sense as well as our faith. So we can ask ourselves, "How will the choice affect those around me?" What are the pros and cons of the choice before us?
- We can look at what is going on within ourselves. Listening to our own inner voice is important. Perhaps we feel unease about what might be the outcome of a possible course of action. If so, the task then is to see if that discomfort is coming because we are being challenged to change or because we think the change would lead us down the wrong road and away from the path of following Christ. So we can ask ourselves "Will this choice free me in my inner self or enslave me?"
- We need to recognise our blind spots. We can all make mistakes so we do well to look at our previous experience. We all carry baggage from the past and sometimes experience shows us what is or what isn't the right path to choose. So we can ask, "What are my strengths and what are my weaknesses?"
- Share with a trusted person. This enables us to test out our thoughts and responses. So we can ask "Who might I talk to about the choices I make?"
- Imagine. What advice would you give to someone else who was in the same position as you?

Reflect-&-Jot

Think of a choice you made recently. It doesn't have to be a very "big" choice but something of importance to you. Using the criteria above note down how you now feel about the choice you made?

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- Turning away is possible but so is turning back. We are called to conversion over and over again.
- Making choices is part of our spiritual life because the choices we make help us conform (or not conform) to the fullness of life God wants for us and others. This is God's will for us.
- We have a rich treasury to draw on to help us hear how God is calling us to discern the right path.
- Discerning God's will requires an attitude of surrender to the God who always wills our good.
- The Holy Spirit is within us and prays within us especially when we don't know how to express in words what is deep within us.

Pray-A-Psalm

Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd) is such a familiar psalm to many of us that we can easily gloss over it. It is used so often at weddings and funerals that our ears can become dulled to the message of openness which it conveys. It eloquently shows the psalmist's relationship with the Lord to be one of intimate surrender to, and trust in, the God of Israel. We can make that prayer our own. Spend some time getting settled and ready. Read the psalm right through slowly. Then read each section stopping after each one to reflect on what the words mean in your relationship with God.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

*Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.*

*Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.*

*If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.*

*You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.*

*You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.*

*My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing.*

*Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.*

*In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever.*

These handouts contain core readings, reflections and pictures from individual chapters of *Do You Love Me?* and are intended as an introduction to, or a recap of, or a simplified use of the guide.



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