

February 18, 2021
Thursday after Ash Wednesday
Deut 30:15-20
Luke 9:22-25

“Choose life....”

We heard those two words proclaimed in today’s reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. Those words are a death-bed teaching from Moses to his people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land after 40 years of seemingly aimless wandering.

Choose life! What beautiful words! What an inspirational exhortation from a leader to his people as he prepares to pass the torch to the next generation and as his people prepare to fulfill their destiny.

Choose life! It strikes me that if one had to edit the entire Bible down to two words, those would be the words.

Every day we are confronted with decisions, large and small. What if we were to adopt a simple moral philosophy, a line we would never cross when making a decision. I submit to you that if our simple moral baseline is “choose life”, we will never make a poor decision.

When the alarm goes off in the morning, you can choose to curse the clock or to utter a prayer of thanksgiving for another day of life.

Each of us choose what we put into our bodies. We can choose life-giving substances or life-snuffing substances.

We choose whether or not to partake of God’s life-giving spiritual gifts that we call sacraments.

The gospel today contains advice from Jesus on how to choose life. He tells us to deny ourselves and take up a cross daily. In other words, make some sacrifice of yourself that can be life-giving to others, exactly as He did for us. It’s interesting that Jesus says to take up a cross daily. I think He’s telling us not to be afraid of failure; to be bold in the crosses we choose to carry. And if we fail, I think Jesus is telling us not to beat ourselves up, for tomorrow is another day full of opportunities to be life-giving to someone. And if we can be life-giving to others, Jesus is telling us that we will also be choosing life for ourselves. Deny yourself; choose life, says Jesus.

So how can we possibly go about denying ourselves? It seems contrary to our human nature which drives us to compete; to achieve; to succeed; to rise above. The truth is, we can only deny ourselves with the help of God.

St Pope Pius X, who was pope when my father came into this world, had a Secretary of State by the name of Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val. Much of Cardinal del Val’s spirituality was centered on this question of how to go about denying oneself. Every day after Mass, Cardinal del Val

would pray for God's help uttering the words of a prayer he penned himself. It's a very long prayer, but I'd like to share with you just a few of its lines.

"From self-will, deliver me, O Lord.
From the desire of being esteemed, deliver me, O Lord.
From the desire of being loved, deliver me, O Lord.
From the desire of being honored, deliver me, O Lord.
From the desire of being praised, deliver me, O Lord.
From the desire to be understood, deliver me, O Lord.
From the fear of being humiliated, deliver me, O Lord.
From the fear of being despised, deliver me, O Lord.

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease, Lord, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be chosen and I set aside, Lord, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be praised and I go unnoticed, Lord, grant me the grace to desire it.
When they never ask my opinion, Lord, I want to rejoice.
When they never compliment me, Lord, I want to rejoice.

As we continue our celebration today, let us make our own petition to the Lord. Lord, please help us choose to live lives that at the end of which we can faithfully tell You that though we may not have been successful, we tried to deny ourselves in this world so that we could in some way help others to live.