15 Homily for the Sixth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

12 February 2017

Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 5:17-37

What would you do if you had the choice today to go to a movie or go to the closest beautiful beach for a walk? What would you choose if you had a chocolate mousse or a bowl of strawberries? We are all created with free choice and how awesome it is to be gifted with it. The first reading taken from the book of Sirach is the clearest formula in the Bible about free will: “He has set before you fire and water.” If you want to get burnt and be destroyed by choosing fire or you can live by drinking superabundant living water and be saved. Further he says: “Before man is life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.” It is very clear that we are not robots or machines manoeuvred by some superior being but independent free men and women with dignity. Thomas Aquinas views free choice as something coupled with our rationality when he says: “Man has free choice to the extent he is rational.” It is quiet true because there is a tendency in the world today to identify free choice with “I don’t care about others. I will do what I want to do.” (Wild ass freedom). But the free choice that God has instilled in us is totally different. So let’s ask why has God given us this gift? There are two reasons for that.

🞜God does not intend evil and nothing other than love emanates from him: “No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin.” (From the Book of Sirach in the first reading today). God is the source all Good. In fact He is the Highest Good. “Summum Bonum” as St Thomas Aquinas introduces it. So he wants us to be part of this Highest Goodness by the proper use of the gift of free choice.

🞜 The second reason as to why God has given the gift of human freedom is to be part of his holiness. The late Jesuit priest Anthony De Mello said: “We all fall short. And therefore we all must not judge. We all are called to holiness, and therefore we must not exempt ourselves.” So God calls us for holiness knowing our weaknesses and failings. He understands man's every deed because he knows everything. “For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.” (Second reading 1 Cor 2:1). But God looks right into our hearts and sees who we can become. He sees the potential in every sinner for holiness.

So to journey to be part of God’s goodness and holiness by the use of our free choice, God has given us some tools which we call “Law of the Lord”. Let’s see what this “Law of the Lord” signifies. The Hebrew word *tôrâh* means more than just ‘law’ as we simplistically understand. It derives from the Hebrew word*yârâh* meaning to shoot out the hand, pointing and indicating a direction. It also means to teach, to instruct, to lay foundations, to sprinkle and to water. So Jesus provides that sense of direction through his Law. His Law is gentle and not imposing, but firm. There is no compromising business with that Law of Christ. Jesus takes the old Law of Moses (613 dos and don’ts) to new heights. How? In the Gospel Jesus uses the words: “You have heard that it was said…” and this formula changes when he says: “But I say to you...”

His new Law brings salvation to all through the cross. It entails absolute sacrifice. So all the free choices he makes are completely conscious choices to please the Abba Father. His prime goal is to make the Father happy. These choices Jesus made ultimately led him to the cross, but after three days the same choices led him to the Resurrection that opened for us eternal life for all humanity. When we make choices to please God but nobody else he will never disappoint us. Such decisions lead us to life eternal. Let’s ask the fundamental question of ourselves: The choices I make, do they lead me and others to have life eternal?