

Dear Friends,

This is my first posting in my Pastor's corner. I would like to use this space to share, communicate and connect with you.

This week I would like to share some thoughts on our last Sunday's reading from John's gospel chapter six.

In the Gospel reading, Simon Peter is presented with a choice: to stay with Jesus or to leave with many of Jesus' disciples. The passage is the end of Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist that followed the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. It was fine when Jesus was handing out free bread and fishes. Then everyone wanted to be his friend. But that was just a meal for a day. What he really wanted was to give people food that would feed them for life, and that meant feeding on him, following him, letting our life be shaped by him – we are what we eat. He said: "I am the living bread" ...and "whoever eats of this bread will live forever" ...and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Suddenly it all began to sound a bit too much like serious commitment, and the crowds began to evaporate. Jesus looked around at his closest followers (the twelve). "What about you? Will you go too?" But Peter had already made his choice. "Who else can we go to? You have the words of eternal life." He didn't have to follow Jesus, but it clearly made no sense to him not to. Not that it was always easy; Peter didn't say that Jesus had the words of eternal happiness. But Jesus had brought him to life that he had never experienced before.

Eternal life in the Bible isn't just, about getting into heaven when we die. It is something that starts here and now. It is about quality and depth and meaning and it seems to me that it is something we all long for. It is about discovering that we matter to God, that we aren't just numbers, disposable collections of atoms, but people who are unique and beloved and called to love in return. This was what Peter had found in Jesus, and he isn't going to give it up just because the crowds have abandoned him. Later on there would be one occasion when he turns away from Christ, when Jesus is arrested and tried. Then he would deny knowing him. But as soon as he had done it he would realize it was the worst mistake of his life, and weep bitterly. And after the resurrection nothing – not even his own suffering and persecution – would deflect him.

We live in a society that is full of choices; choices in the supermarkets, choices between schools and hospitals and jobs. Those multiple options can become as much of a burden as a gift. How do you know you are choosing the right thing? Would that other brand of coffee, that other school or hospital, that other job be better? If those choices feel tough, it is even harder when it comes to choosing a way of life, a pattern for living. Fewer and fewer people want to check a box on a census form that identifies them as following a particular faith, but for most the "atheist" box isn't the option they want either. My experience is that a lot of people put themselves in the "spiritual but not religious" category. They are open to the possibility that there are dimensions to life that can't be weighed and measured and understood, but they don't want to commit themselves to one specific way of exploring what that might mean for them.

I guess the organized religion has a bad name for some people sometimes. But the fact is that all of us, whether we like it or not, find in the end that we have walked one path through life rather than another whether we chose that path consciously or not. We find we've been guided by these values rather than those. We've seen the world through this framework rather than that. We've travelled with these companions rather than those. As Bob Dylan insightfully sang, "It may be the devil or it may be the Lord/ But you're gonna have to serve somebody."

If we don't make our choices deliberately, we will find in the end that we have made them by default. Resisting commitment is just as much a choice as choosing it, and when we look back, wondering how on earth we got to where we are, maybe not liking it much, we may wish we'd been paying more attention to those choices when they presented themselves.

Whatever our choices, of course, we can't go back and undo the past, but the good news is that God gives us another day and another time when we can choose again, because we make our pathway through the world one step at a time. So however far we've come through life, we still have choices to make. Today we will have choices about the way we spend our time or our money, the way we treat those around us, the way we think about ourselves and others, the words we speak – words that build up or tear down. This week we will have decisions to make at work or at home or in our communities which will shape them in small ways or large. Which will be the right ones?

There are no easy answers, but it seems to me that the key to making those choices well is the same for us as it was for Peter. We need to stay closely connected to Jesus/God, who is the Way and the Truth and the Life, through prayer and frequent reception of His body and blood in the Eucharist. Also, we have to make choices that take us beyond ourselves and our own narrow interests as we strive to serve and to love one another. These are the paths which Jesus took and if we choose them, we will find ourselves walking in the footsteps of the Holy One of God.

In Christ's peace,  
Father Jacek