

“Lord to whom shall we go?”

Our readings today focus on choices, decisions, and commitments. Every day, each of us face an array of choices, most are insignificant and trivial, but ultimately, the decisions we make, both big and small, define who we are as a person. I like to define character as doing the right thing even when no one is watching. So today, we are challenged to ask ourselves if we want to continue to commit ourselves to following Jesus, even when the path becomes difficult.

Over the last several weeks, we’ve heard about the crowds who flocked to Jesus. People witnessed Jesus cure the sick, love the poor and dying, and touch countless lives with their very own eyes. Yet when his words made them uncomfortable, they walked away. Despite everything they had experienced, they left Jesus because they couldn’t grasp the truth of his words. Jesus was simply asking people to live in the present, to be a source of healing, love and compassion for others, and to let the Bread of Life sustain them on their journey, especially in times of doubt and need.

Jesus began his ministry by saying "I have come to proclaim good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind, and to heal the brokenhearted." In other words, Jesus came to raise up those in need and to call all people to do the same. But Jesus didn’t stop there. He taught us not to just love those who love us, but to love our enemies. He taught us not to judge people, but simply to love them. Jesus encouraged us not only to forgive, but to be the first to forgive, to be the one who reaches out in reconciliation. Jesus challenged us to sow the seeds of love and healing everywhere we go. He showed us it was possible.

Jesus knows it’s not easy. He doesn’t expect us to be perfect, but he wants us to try. You’ve heard me share this quote from St. Augustine many times, but it’s worth repeating: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” I refer to it frequently because it is loaded with so much truth. God has planted a seed of faith deep inside each and everyone one of us and until we allow it to unfold within us, we will continue to search and be unsettled because it is only in God’s love that we are made whole, that we truly find peace. Without God in our lives we will continue to search,

continue to try to fill the void with material things or physical pleasures that only leave us hungering for more.

Jesus touched many people, some stayed with him for a short time and others followed him to the cross. The truth is, the words of Jesus are hard to accept -- turning the other cheek, loving everyone without exception, not judging. Jesus wasn't constrained by what other people thought because he was motivated by love. The challenge to love, to allow our faith to guide our choices and actions is difficult. So, in our gospel reading today, we find the followers of Jesus reacting to his teachings and we're told many people left. You can almost feel the sadness when Jesus asks Peter, "Will you leave me too?"

The beautiful refrain of our opening hymn sums up our calling to follow Jesus even when the path is difficult:

Lord when you came to the seashore, you weren't seeking the wise or the wealthy, but only asking that I might follow. O Lord in my eyes you were gazing, kindly smiling, my name you were saying. All I treasured, I have left on the sand there, close to you, I will find other seas.

My friends, when we trust Jesus, we will find peace. All that Jesus is asking is that we trust him, that we try to make the right choices and decisions in life, and that we commit to following him, even when the path is difficult.

Sometimes the Church makes the path more difficult than it need be. But we have to remember, you and I, each person in this room are the Church, the people of God. The sex abuse scandal that is rocking the Roman Catholic Church will cause some people to loose their faith. The depraved acts of some priests, and the bishop's failure to act is unconscionable. Their actions caused lasting emotional and spiritual damage to far too many. I spent many years in the Roman Catholic Church before becoming an Old Roman Catholic, and I am ashamed of the actions of some the priests and the inaction of Church leaders. The only thing I can say is that they will have to answer for their behavior before God. I truly hope our friends in the Roman Catholic Church have the courage and moral fortitude to deal with this crisis in an honest and transparent manner.

When we face challenges in our faith or in our lives, if we continue to stand with God, we will find love and healing. If we continue to follow Jesus, to trust his amazing love, we can find the strength to walk on knowing that God will continue to lead us, to love us, and to fill us with peace and strength. We come to this table to celebrate God's love, to be nourished and fed by the Bread of Life. The church is not about any one person; it's about God; it's about loving God and committing ourselves each and every day to letting God transform our hearts and minds; to heal our brokenness and pain. When Jesus asked Peter and the other disciples if they would leave him too, it's a question for us as well. May each of us find the courage of Peter to respond: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."