

Love is a Choice

By: Fr. Joseph Pellegrino

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.

It is quite flattering for us to realize that Jesus has chosen each of us. There are billions of people in the world, but we have been chosen to carry the message of the Kingdom. We have been chosen to bear fruit.

Quite flattering, indeed. Only the choice comes with a price. Deep down, it can even be an annoyance. If we have been chosen to work for the Kingdom, then our options are limited. If we have put on the baptismal gown, we cannot wear the clothes of pagans. This is hard to accept in a society that preaches endless choices, a society that caters to infantile fantasies of no rules and no limits to life.

Consider how we are brainwashed by advertisements into the concept that we have endless options in life. The motto of Isuzu: "The world has boundaries, ignore them." Foster Grant tells us that buying their sunglasses will firmly place us among those who have no limits. The Outback Steakhouse uses the motto No rules Just Right.

And then Jesus comes along and tells us to put on the uniform of discipleship. We come to the realization that because we have been chosen, we have to have rules for a way of life that will be called Christian. We have to deny our infantile desires for the infinitely greater good of the Kingdom of God.

An example might help. A young boy gets his first after school job working in his grandfather's little store. After a few months, his grandfather felt confident that the boy could be left to handle the store alone for brief periods of time. It was during one of these few hours when the boy was alone that the store was robbed. The grandson was shot to death. A few days later the robbers were captured. It was the same day as the boy's funeral. A news reporter interviewed the grandfather and asked him if he wanted the robbers to receive capital punishment. The grandfather looked shocked at the question. "I cannot wish that," he said. "I am a Christian, I am not permitted revenge." Christianity imposes limits.

You are aware that Mother Teresa was often asked why she spent so much time and energy helping people who were going to die anyway, and most of them not even Christian. Her answer was that she had no choice. She was a Christian, committed to serving Jesus, and Christ identified with the poorest of the poor.

You may not have heard the story of Princess Alice, the second daughter of Queen Victoria of England. The princess married and had a child, a baby boy. When the child was four he came down with a terrible disease at the time called black diphtheria. It was highly contagious. There was no cure and no hope. The doctors and nurses told the princess that she had to stay away from her son. Her own health was frail. One day as she stood at the door of her little boy's room, she heard him whispering to a nurse, "Why doesn't my Mommy hold me and kiss me anymore?" That was more than Princess Alice could bear. She then did what any loving

mother would do. She ran to her son's bed, hugged him and kissed him. She had no choice. She had to show her love. He needed her. Within weeks she came down with the sickness. Both were buried together.

The choice of love demands that we accept limitations on our lives and even pain and suffering in order to love as Jesus loved. You parents respond to your baby's cries in the middle of the night. You have no choice if you really love your child in the true meaning of love. A teenager listens to a friend's story of family difficulties. The other teen needs an ear that understands. The first teen would much rather be listening to music, but has no choice but to be present for the suffering friend. Christianity demands it. A retiree spends a few hours each day with an elderly neighbor. He'd rather be fishing, but he has no choice but to visit Christ's presence in the homebound. An auto mechanic repairs a traveling family's car after the garage's hours so the poor folks can get on the road and get their kids to bed. He would rather be with his own family, but he is a Christian, he has no choice. And on and on. Millions of little routine daily sacrifices make the greatest life there ever was a reality in our world.

Love, the true love of Jesus, imposes limits on us. Love is sacrificial. When we look at the cross, we realize the life that we have been chosen to lead. We have been chosen to lead Jesus' life a reality. And he died for others.

There is a great little story about a scheme the devil had to sneak into heaven. The legend goes that just before dawn on Easter Sunday, the devil dressed up as the Risen Lord. He had his fallen angels accompany him, all dressed as angels of light. As he approached the gates of heaven he and his mob cried out the words of Psalm 24, "Lift up your heads, O gates of Heaven. Rise up you ancient portals, that the King of Glory might enter."

The real angels looked down at whom they thought was their King returning in triumph from the dead. So they shouted back in joy the next words of that psalm, "Who is the King of Glory?" The devil then made a fatal mistake. He opened his arms, spread his palms and declared, "I am the King of Glory." He did himself in. The angels immediately slammed shut the gates of heaven. They saw right away that there were no marks of the nails in his palms. He had no wounds of love. He was obviously an imposter.

To put it very simple. If we have been chosen by Christ, and we have, then we have to accept his way of life, the way of limits, the way of sacrificial love.

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 10:25-48 1 John 4:7-14 John 15:9-17

May 10, 2015

靈 修 生 活

我 們 的 聖 召 就 是 愛

「親愛的修生！如果天主願意，有一天你們也會被聖召祝聖，開始你們的使命。你們要始終記著耶穌的話：“你們留在我的愛內”（若十五 9）。如果你們留在基督內，你們將結很多果實。不是你們選擇了祂，而是祂選擇了你們（若十 16），這就是你們的聖召及使命的秘密！」

以上是教宗本篤十六世在科隆向參加世青的各國修生的講話片段。這是一篇非常豐富的訓話。教宗引述賢士們追隨異星、尋找救主的歷程來形容修生們追隨聖召、尋找基督的歷程。這召叫和使命的奧秘就是愛。

原來我們之所以被召為基督徒，或修道者或司鐸，不是為天主做甚麼偉大事業，而是成為祂所鍾愛的子女、更親密、更密切地跟隨基督，肖似基督，承行主旨。我們的召叫首先就是愛，我們的使命就是認識、愛慕和事奉天主。

有一位青年懷疑天主的存在，他要去請教一位熱心的修士：

「你信有天主嗎？」「當然，我信。」

「你根據甚麼而信天主呢？」「我信天主，因為我認識祂，我感驗到祂每日在我內。」

「但是怎樣能感驗到祂呢？」「當我們愛就感驗到天主，而且我們疑惑也會消失，如同晨霧在太陽升起時自動消失一樣。」

這位青年繼續問：「請修士指教我要怎樣去做呢？」「實踐愛吧！你努力愛你周圍的人，積極地愛、不停地愛。當你懂得日益增加愛；你就愈能確信天主的存在。這是我所經驗過，而且是事實。」

這位修士回答的正如若望所說：「你們要彼此相愛，因為愛出於天主，凡是愛祂的人，都是天主所生，也認識天主。那不愛祂的人，就不認識天主，因為天主是愛。」（讀經二）

的確，愛是認識生命和認識天主的先決條件。不是我們愛了天主，而是祂愛了我們。不是我們揀選了祂，而是祂揀選了我們。天主因著愛，按照祂的肖像創造了我們。基督因愛而召叫了我們。我們是否知道自己是天主所鍾愛的？我們的召叫是為了如同基督一樣毫無條件奉獻自己呢？

「不是你們揀選了我，而是我揀選了你們，並派遣你們去結果實，結常存的果實。」（若十五 16）信德是天主的禮物，聖召是天主的恩賜。天主主動的召叫、邀請，這是出自祂的愛，並賜給我們一個愛的使命：「你們要彼此相愛，就如我愛了你們一樣。」（若十五 12）真正的愛是要付出，要犧牲，付出愈多，犧牲愈大，愛愈有意義，愈是真愛：「人若為朋友付出生命，就再沒有比這更大的愛了。」（若十五 13）

愛的泉源發自聖父而至聖子，不如同湖水停留著，卻傾流入我們每人的心中。若是愛使我們與天主連結在一起，這愛也連結我們在一起。雖然我們無法如同耶穌一樣愛到極點，但基督的愛催促我們永遠嚮往祂走過的路。我們怎能履行呢？依靠金錢和財物嗎？權力和地位嗎？學識和研究嗎？不是，因為這一切都是有限的。只有「存留在祂的愛內」，我們才有愛的力量，並能生活出基督的仁愛與寬恕、犧牲與服務。

今日的世界熱切渴求真正的愛。基督徒應該是愛的見證。我們不致於如同主耶穌為他人而死，但我們卻可以為他人而活。為他人而活就是死於自我，在每日默默的辛勞和犧牲中而死；雖然不是流血的死，卻是流汗流淚，為了別人的幸福而逐漸耗盡自己。

禱文：主耶穌！我們懇求祢，以祢的聖言堅強我們的信德，以祢的體血滋養我們，使我們永遠與祢結合，好能以言以行光榮天主及服務他人。 亞孟。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 五 年 五 月 十 日

宗 10:25-48; 若一 4:7-14; 若 15:9-17