



SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE A

Sirach 15:15-20
1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Matthew 5:17-37

GATHERING

(In addition to an unlit candle, some heart-shaped objects, e.g., a candleholder, a jewelry box, a mirror, a picture frame, a rock, and some valentines are arranged on a small table in the center of the room.)

We are given an opportunity this week to reflect on the importance of choice in life and on living beyond the letter of the law. We were challenged last week to be a tangy catalyst for change. *(As the session begins, members mention some experience of the past week when their presence added a dash of gospel salt to an event in which they participated.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(A member of the community lights the candle. The community sings, "God of Wisdom, Truth, and Beauty". The song may be found on the Internet. The community prays the following prayer.)

Leader: Blessed are you, Lord,
Father in heaven,
who, in your infinite mercy,
stooped down to us in our distress

and gave us Jesus, your Son, born of a woman,
to be our Saviour and friend, our brother and redeemer.
We thank you, good Father,
for the gift of years.
May our lives sing your praises.
We pray for all who are far from you.
Keep us faithful. Forgive our selfishness.
Embrace us all in your forgiveness
and welcome us to your kingdom table.
.May we rejoice with you always.

All: We praise you, Father, forever.

Adapted from a prayer for the new millennium.

Focus Question

Name a wise choice you have made recently.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Every day we wake up we begin by making choices. We decide when to get up, what to wear. We make a plan of action for the day. As the day draws us into interaction with others we begin to make choices on a deeper level, choices that involve not only ourselves, but also our spouse, our children, our co-workers, our friends. Our day is a string of choices, one right after the other.

Decisions we make every day reflect our morality and spirituality. We may confront a serious error at work and we make a choice about what action to take. When someone makes a request for our time, we choose to honor the request or ignore it. When someone in our life needs our forgiveness, we choose to clear the air with that person or hold the grudge.

The first three words from the reading from Sirach, “If you choose” help us put our actions into spiritual perspective. *If*, the author says. What a wonderful liberating word! It is an open invitation to new possibilities.

You, the Spirit calls. God is issuing a personal invitation, not to a neighbor, not to your spouse, or to your child, but to *you*. *Choose*, it is an invitation to act, to do, and to make something happen. Sometimes we choose one thing over another just out of habit. Maybe it is time to take a closer look at those choices, to assess what kinds of habits we have established, what patterns of choices.

To make a life we have to make choices. But we don't have to make choices all alone. The Spirit whispers in the quiet uttering of our hearts to help us make wise choices. The Spirit is God's wisdom, often mysterious and hidden, but a wisdom that enables us to find our way. Here we are on the edge of another Lent. Where will these three words, *if you choose*, take you in the next six weeks?

Jesus assures us that although most things do pass away, the kingdom of God is not one of those things. It is now and it is forever. The choices we make today and every day reflect how deeply we are living in union with God's reign. The deeper our union with God, the more we are living life beyond the letter of the law.

Just as there are levels of meaning to words and experiences, so too there are levels of choice. We can keep "the letter of the law". That is a healthy and moral thing to do. But Jesus says it is better to go beyond the letter of the law, to enter into the spirit of the law where the "mysterious hidden wisdom" of God may be found and where we live with greater joy. Not killing fulfills the law, but offering forgiveness for injury or offense, that is wisdom.

Living freely and dying to selfish and lazy habits takes work. But we have help along the way. Prayer plays an important part in helping us to stay focused on making right choices. Training ourselves to be mindful of the choices we are making while making them is another help. Feeding our minds with wholesome information from spirit-filled literature is yet another way to guide us in making right choices.

Ash Wednesday will soon challenge us to enter freely and deliberately into the season of Lent. With the ancient symbolic ritual of being marked with ashes, we will be asked to turn from sin and live the gospel more fully. What will you choose? *If you choose . . .*

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions that follow.)

1. Recall an occasion when you made a difficult *choice* that resulted in a life-giving experience for yourself or another?
2. Share a time when you experienced, or witnessed someone else acting from a wisdom of the Spirit.
3. What are some possible real life *choices* you as an individual might be facing in the coming weeks, *choices* that might be challenging and call for the spirit of wisdom?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. For Valentine's Day this year, Make a *choice* to send a loving message to someone who may be overlooked. Someone in a nursing home, hospital, or veteran's home would welcome this thoughtful acknowledgment.
2. Learn more about the practice of Centering Prayer. Write or call for resources: Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., P.O. Box 737, Butler, NJ 07405, (201) 838-3384.
3. *Choose* to set aside fifteen minutes some day this week to learn more about the work of the Spirit by reading from one of the books of the prophets or the Book of Sirach.
4. Draw up a personal list of *choices* you may be facing in the coming weeks and deliberately invite the Holy Spirit to help you make the wise *choice*.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The facilitator invites the community to a time of silent prayer. After several minutes members pray the prayer that follows in two alternating groups.)

- I. To You we call, True God and Savior,
in Whom there is no prevarication,
no lies, no duplicity.
- II. Make of us, here and now, true believers,
who walk the ways of integrity
and live lives that are true.
- I. So much of our world is artificial,
superficial,
counterfeit or fake,
parading its false premises,
hawking its imitations,
pretending it is genuine.
- II. So many around us live the lie
and are trapped
in its innuendoes.
So what is truth? they ask,
out of their bold hypocrisies,
remaining immune
to what is authentic.
- I. Give me an honest heart, O God;
help me to say
what I want to say,
unconcerned about pleasing people
or being easy
on myself.
- II. Give me a truth-telling tongue, O God,
that will not hesitate
to call the question,
no matter what the consequences,

the circumstance,
the risk.

- I. You are the Way, the Truth,
the Life that is lived
wholly transparent:
give us transparency.

- II. Your Word Who is truth says,
keep my word,
speak the truth,
and the truth will make you free
and keep you true
to Me.

"A Psalm of Desire for Truth" by M.T. Winter. From **WomanWord** (NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1994), p. 186.

