

Homily for the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 8th, 2019

By Deacon Nick Thompson

I don't know if there are any old George Jones fans out there today but old George wrote a song called "Choices", it goes like this:

I've had choices since the day that I was born.

There were voices that told me right from wrong.

If I had listened, I wouldn't be here today.

Living and dying with the choices I've made.

George must have been reading from the Book of Wisdom as he wrote the lyrics to this song. In the verses, He speaks of his plans gone wrong, the burdens of his soul, the many concerns which have weighed down his mind. He also speaks of God's counsel, the wisdom he has received throughout the years, the voice of the Holy Spirit pleading, persuading, directing him on the path to the things of heaven.

We are slaves to time, so many choices to make in our brief lives. When we are children, we give little thought to the decisions we make. We measure their success and importance in smiles, hugs, scolding and spankings. Even in our young adult years we fly through decisions by the seat of our pants never considering the impact a single decision can have on the rest of our lives. We hear a crowd of voices pouring out buckets of advice good and bad. They say things like: You have plenty of time,

think about it before you just do it, but life is short, the opportunity may never come again, if it feels good do it, live life in the now and suddenly BLAMMO! In a heartbeat our lives are changed by a single decision good or bad, right or wrong and we find ourselves living and dying with the choice we have made. We cannot take it back. We cannot change it. We can only move forward with it good or bad. Hopefully we grow in wisdom equally from our decisions both good and bad. But because we are subject to time in only a moment, we will face the next decision.

How do we train ourselves to make only good decisions, to act with God's Wisdom, to decide on God's plan for us? In the psalm this morning hopefully each of us turned to the Father in prayer, raised our minds to God and listened as the cantor sang, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain Wisdom of heart." We need Wisdom from above, from the Holy Spirit, to see through the pressures, the temptations, the uncertainty; to discover the voice of truth, the voice of the Holy Spirit amongst the noisy clatter of the world. Jesus gives instruction to those who would seek to be his disciples. Good decision making, that is choosing the Kingdom of Heaven, requires us to carry our own cross, to calculate the cost and to renounce all possessions. Making good decisions sounds difficult.

Good decision making requires that we discover the cross God is calling us to carry not the one we fabricate. Decide to trust that God the

Father calls us to the cross we are to carry just as he called his son. As Jesus speaks to the crowd, he knows already that his cross will include suffering and death but ultimately resurrection and eternal life. He decides to become one with his Father. The twelve men who follow Jesus have already decided to give up mother, father, sister, brother, wife and children as well as career to follow Jesus. All but one will decide to give their lives for Jesus. Often our greatest obstacle to taking up our cross and deciding to answer God's call is the obligation we feel to family. With family comes senses of dependency, obligation and responsibility in our minds these become our' cross without consideration of any other. How many of us have heard the expressions, I have to: take care of me first, take care of family first, wife and children first, take care of brother and sister, friend etc. etc. etc. first before I can take care of strangers. I have to feed mine, clothe mine, put a roof over their heads first before I can take care of anything else and that includes God. I'm too busy with family and work and all my obligations to fully commit to God. We use family as a blinder, an excuse and decide to not trust that God can make room for anything else in our' lives. Carrying our own cross requires that we first decide to ask God the identity of our' true cross and come to understand that it belongs to us and no one else, no one to blame it on, no one to pass responsibility for it on to. Jesus says to become his disciple we must decide to open the doors of our homes, our

relationships, our hearts and include all of mankind into our realm of dependency, obligation and responsibility. We decide to trust God, decide to make a commitment to him. Good decision making, measures the impact of our decisions on all humanity. In our decision making, family does not come first unless family first includes all.

Before making decisions, Jesus asks that we sit down and calculate the cost to our holiness. In Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus does not calculate the cost of his decision. He has sold himself into bondage and is therefore considered a slave, the property of Philemon. He has received from Philemon in advance a promissory note perhaps to pay a debt or build a house. Now he must work off his debt and is unhappy with the working conditions and so decides to run away to Rome. In making this decision he has now become a thief. He has stolen himself from Philemon. Now he makes a good decision, he converts to Christianity. Paul now must teach Onesimus that there is price to pay for bad decisions. He is obligated to advise Onesimus to return and negotiate with Philemon. Onesimus takes Paul's advice returns and is treated more than fairly by Philemon. Onesimus' decisions direct his life from free man to slave to Christian to free man to bishop of Antioch. Philemon discovers that good decisions based on truth and honor benefit everyone while decisions built on lies and earthly desire lead to a loss of freedom. What sins do we sell our souls into slavery for? Before deciding

to perform any act, we know to be wrong, calculate the cost to our soul, fully realizing that hell will never for all eternity find completion. We know neither the day nor the hour we will be called to answer for our decisions. Perhaps we should decide to practice self-control.

Jesus teaches us to base our decision making on heavenly reward not on earthly possessions. The moment we possess more than we need is the moment we become enslaved to storing it, protecting it and admiring it. Possessions limit our ability to be free to serve God with our whole heart our whole mind and our whole soul. If the most important thing to God is people both the kings in our Gospel must make their decision based on the lives that will be lost not the kingdom to be gained or lost. Building our kingdoms on earth, as the homeless lie on our streets; basing our decisions on satisfying our earthly desires, as thousands go hungry among us, these things will disappear at the moment of our death when we begin to live in eternity with the choices we have made.

Base our decisions then on prayerful commitment to discovery of the cross we are called by God to carry, self-control in the face of things that are costly to our soul and freedom of attachment to earthly possessions that will disappear in God's kingdom. And finally of the greatest importance listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the counsel from on high who will direct us to the ways of heaven. If we can learn to

base all our decisions firmly in God's way, God's truth, God's light we will find ourselves singing George's song but with a slightly different lyric:

I've had choices since the day that I was born.

There were voices that told me right from wrong.

Because I listened, is why I'm here today.

Living and dying with the choices I've made.