

## Choices, choices choices

*The following is an edited version of a column in the October 2008 issue of **In Stephen's Footsteps**, a newsletter published by the Office of the Diaconate.*

A friend of mine hates New Jersey diners. Well, maybe “hates” is too strong a word. He doesn't really hate them. He loves their ambiance and their food. It's just their menus that upset him: There are just too many choices and he finds it overly stressful.

I've asked him to go to lunch or dinner at a nearby diner and he's all for it – but I have to call ahead with his order (BLT on whole wheat toast and chipotle mayonnaise; no pickles or fries, extra cole slaw, and unsweetened iced tea with lemon. For dinner, it's three -- and only three, no more, no less – cheese-stuffed shells with marinara sauce and a salad with balsamic vinaigrette and a diet coke.) He insists that you must make the call: It's the menu. He doesn't want to be confronted with choices; he hates to make decisions.

Don't even ask about going out for coffee. You know how it goes: Tall, Grande or Venti? Caf or decaf? Room for cream and sugar? Whole milk or skim? For here or take-out?

Don't get him started on calling his doctor's office, his parish or some public agency. He gets so labored and upset by the experience that it's best for you to do all you can to skirt the issue altogether. Once he gets started, he gets totally out of control and you have no idea where the tirade will lead.

Remarkably -- or maybe not -- he has fears about dying and going to Heaven. That's right. Get this, he's afraid that he'll reach the Pearly Gates and be greeted by St. Peter, who will say to him: “Welcome, good and faithful servant. You have done well in great things and even in small. Would you like a big mansion or a small one? In the city or in the country? Summer, fall, winter or spring? In the woods or on the shore of a river, lake, bay or sea?”

I have another very dear friend who is totally free of this sort of odd thinking. His approach to life is far more simple and straightforward. He is not at all bothered by these inconsequential choices. You must set your eyes, your heart, your life and your mind on Jesus and don't stray. Life and its choices are very clear.

This friend would tell you that we enter eternal life at the moment of conception. We are created by God as beings of flesh and spirit. Physically, in body, we are bound to time. Spiritually, with an immortal soul, we are made for eternity. We are conceived in time, born in time, live in time, and with our last breath we pass through the portal of death from mortality to life eternal.

It is in this life, in this mortal realm, that we choose life or we choose death -- in the way we live, in what we do and what we fail to do, in what we embrace and what we shun. Every day we have the opportunity to make the most precious choice in life, to keep our eyes, our hearts and our lives centered on Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.