

Reading: [Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

When it comes to faith, it's not a matter of choosing belief or non-belief, it is a matter of choosing possibility....

All right, let's conclude our story...

He continued walking in the desert of that lent getting used to the idea that there was nothing else. He tried choosing belief, but he couldn't, so there was only one option left... unbelief, no God, no rain, no mana. Not wanting his family to know and worry, though they could tell something was wrong, he pretended best he could that everything was fine and got good a faking his way through mass.

The dreaded Holy Week had arrived. He had decided not to go to any of the holy week services because it would feel strange feeling empty at celebrations that once meant so much to him. While at work that Holy Thursday he got a call from his sister, the youth minister of their home parish, telling him she would be late for mass and needed someone to help organize the teens to usher. He didn't want to go, he already had the excuse of having to work overtime, but decided to not use it and instead *chose to say yes*... figuring it would be at least be community service.

Evening came, he arrived at the Church, got the teens organized, and then proceeded to sit down at his usual pew, same place he sat months earlier on

Christmas eve asking for a sign, asking for that candle to flicker. Being there, looking at those candles triggered the sense of emptiness again, reminding him of why he didn't want to be there.

After the homily, twelve stools were placed up near the altar as twelve people came up to sit, they would do the yearly representation of the washing of the feet, something he had witnessed every year since he could remember, but for some reason, his eyes were fixed on that priest, Fr. Philip Bloom, who sat on his presider chair as he waited for everyone to get situated. Not sure why, but he couldn't get his gaze off him, there was something about his calm aging face... he perceived in him *a sense of purpose and fulfilment he could not explain.*

Once everyone was ready, he observed as Father stood, took off his chasuble, the outer garment priests wear for mass, carefully placed it on his chair and slowly walked towards one end of the line, eyes continued to be fixed on him, observing every move, every gesture, it was captivating... Father is given a pitcher of water, and kneels to begin washing the feet of the first individual. As water came pouring down from that pitcher, something else comes pouring down over the young man. What happened next, no words can adequately describe.

In an instant, he felt completely surrounded by this overwhelming presence around him, next to him, in front of him, in him, a presence that felt both near and far, foreign, and familiar... a presence that he can only describe as being surrounded by the essence of love, pure love...

The feeling, the awareness, oh it was irresistible. At that instant, all doubt, sadness, numbness, lack of meaning and depression he had felt throughout lent completely dissipated and was transformed into an unexplainable joy, a certainty, an inner assurance of faith as he said to himself; *God is real, Jesus is here, I am loved. God is real, Jesus is here, I am loved...*

Not only did he feel loved, but he also felt the *urge*, the *need* to be the one washing the feet of those people... a thought that not only surprised him, for he never thought about being a priest before, but one that he knew would bring him that which he had been seeking: meaning, purpose.

The whole experience was overwhelming in the best of ways, and as if things couldn't get any better, at the consecration as Father uttered the words "*take this all of you and eat of it, for this is my body...*" and held the eucharist high for all to see, he again was flooded with the immense sense of love and like powerful magnet, felt a pull towards that peace of bread, a literal physical pull, so real his hands grasped

the pew to keep him from running up to the altar, pushing Father aside, and be the one holding the host.

He was being consumed by the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, wanting nothing more than to somehow be united with it, to be in the host, to be one with him. He was in love... and there was no doubt in his mind the reason for his existence was to experience that moment of grace, and that his life mission was to do whatever it took for others to experience this as well. *The rain had come. Mana appeared in the desert. The candle was lit.* As we went home that night he was glad he *made the choice* to be there that night, a choice that led me to *discover fire*.

Ove the past four weeks we have gone through John 6, the bread of life discourse, which I have taken it as an opportunity to share my personal testimony with you, my vocation story which providentially happens to correlate with the themes found in this chapter. My goal in doing this is three-fold: so that you can get to know me a little more, to gage your homily length tolerance level, and to speak about common struggles with faith. I hope you always know that I am with you in the struggle.

We looked at the difficulty that comes when we have to ask for signs, but nothing happens. When we try to work for God's favor but fall short and are

tempted to give up. And, when a crisis of faith leads to indifference, numbness, depression. In all these struggles, one theme keeps resurfacing: the importance of honesty – how, no matter what our struggle with faith might be, what God cares about the most is our honesty – that is where left off.

Today we see how honesty leads us towards a choice. When it comes to faith, people think of the choice to be between belief or non-belief. Between choosing one religion or another. Between choosing right or wrong... but this is not how we should approach the choice for faith, there are problems with that which we will see in the readings. So, God offers us a third choice: the choice of *possibility*. What do I mean by that? Well, let's explore this by looking at the attitude of people in the first reading and then the gospel.

In the first reading Joshua gathers the people of Israel as they are trying to figure out what to do when it came to their faith. They were now finally out of the desert and in the promise land and were facing an issue: which God do we serve and worship? They thought they only had two choices: to be faithful to the god of their ancestors before they were enslaved in Egypt, or, serve and worship the god of this new land they now inhabited. They couldn't think of God in any other way, their conception of God was that there were many, and they were regional, and so

YAHWE, the one and only God who had revealed himself to them, was being dismissed because well, he just didn't fit their conception of what a god was. So here is where Joshua offers them a third choice: *how about choosing to serve the God who took you out of Egypt, the God who fed you in the desert when all seemed lost, the God who has brought you to this new land, the God who is not bound to a particular region, the God who has revealed himself to you as the I AM, the only God?* They were being invited to make a third choice, the choice of the possibility, and they take it, even when they don't fully understand, they take it.

Look now at the disciples, and they are in a similar dilemma. Jesus is offering them new teachings, new ways to think about God, but they are hard to accept so they are filled with doubt.

The two things they found difficult was Jesus' self-identification as the "Son of Man" and his insistence to eat his flesh. These were troubling statements because this is not how God was supposed to be... God was not supposed to be physically present to them in human form. God was not supposed to be feeding them and sacrificing himself for them either, if anything, humans are the ones who were supposed to offer sacrifice to feed the blood-thirsty gods.... So, they had good reasons to be doubtful and in their doubt felt like they only had two choices: to

reject Jesus remain faithful to the God of their ancestors, or believe Jesus and worship a new God...

Jesus is giving them a third option: he welcomes their honest doubt, but instead of giving them a long explanation of what he meant, he simply reiterates. In doing this, Jesus is offering them a third choice: the choice of giving Jesus the benefit of the doubt that what he is saying will make sense. You see, what he wants is for them to stay close to him, even with their doubt, because at the end, more than explaining what he meant, he wanted them to experience what he meant.

To those who believe, no explanation is necessary. To those who don't believe, no explanation is possible.

This is the third choice: the choice to give Jesus a chance to show them something new, something different, the choice to be open to the experience of Christ. Some left, others stayed, and for those that stayed, they came to experience the power of the resurrection, and finally, without an explanation, what Jesus had said to them, it made sense.

This is both the challenge and model in our own lives of faith. We all struggle with aspects of Christianity. Some struggle with belief in God in general, others struggle to believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, others struggle to

trust in Pope Francis, others struggle with a particular moral teaching, and others struggle with feeling like they will never be able to overcome a particular sin or vice... The problem is not the struggle, the problem is what choices we think we have...

The invitation is to choose the third choice, to stay close to Jesus even when it doesn't make sense... that is the only way we give God a chance to do something with our doubt, our struggle, our difficulty.

I say this with confidence because of that powerful experience where Jesus did just that... where my lack of belief was transformed into inner certainty... into a desire to be consumed by the Eucharist and all I had to do was make a choice to be there. There is no explanation to what happened that holy Thursday except to say I had an encounter with the living Christ, and the desire that encounter produces is the reason I am here with you, hoping to somehow facilitate those encounters for you as well. Somehow, somewhere, in some way, candles flicker, rains come, mana is made present, and this time, together, our story will always continue as we discover fire.

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