

Twenty-First Sunday A

Matthew 16: 13-20

Since last Thursday, August 20, the new rules under the so-called, “*Act Now Honolulu – No Social Gatherings*” order is now in effect and will remain in place until the end of September. Citing triple digits in new COVID-19 cases, the Hawaii Governor published a set of restrictions and prohibited social gatherings larger than five people. As reported, “This will affect not only private events, but also limit group sizes in restaurants, as well as indoor and outdoor attractions.”

“In-person spiritual services will once again be allowed starting this Saturday, as long as worshippers follow social distancing guidelines and wear masks,” the Honolulu Mayor said last Friday (8/21). “Religious services can be a key resource to help many of us get through these tough times.”

So, here we are, sitting in a church pew. We are here because, somewhere and sometime, we made decisions. Choices. Many years ago, for instance, we may have decided we are Catholics, people of God and we would worship as faithfully as we eat and sleep.

And, here we are today at church celebrating the sacrifice of the Mass as the Lord commanded us at his Last Supper, “Do this in memory of Me”. Our presence required no great decision this morning. It's simply part of us, who and whose we truly are, sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the Lord.

On the other hand, perhaps some of us are here today because we have decided we needed to begin this part of our life of faith over again. We needed strength of the faith to go through this extremely difficult time. Whatever the motivation behind our decisions, we are here because we made our choices as we did.

Choices. They have been with us from our birth. Since the beginning of time, choosing is one of those elements which makes us uniquely human. Choices have been with the church since its infancy, and ever since the days when Jesus asked his first disciples who they thought he was. “Who do people say that I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

And when he asked his apostles who they thought he was, Peter answered without hesitation.

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"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Not only did Peter speak of a truth greater than he realized, but he also found his life taking a different turn and his very destiny changed.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

One of the greatest gifts that God has given us is the power to choose. With this freedom we have the ability to make choices. But choices have consequences. Some choices bring good consequences. Other choices bring bad consequences. It depends upon the choices we make for good or bad.

But in the case of Peter and his great confession of faith, I imagine that his life was changed for good.

**"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,
but my heavenly Father."**

Not only did Jesus recognize His Father's choice of Peter but chose him and named him "rock", the foundation of His Church.

As it was with Simon Peter, son of Jonah, so it is with us today. We may not be solid or worthy. We may be lukewarm Catholics or half-hearted followers. We don't always do the right thing -- we stray, we wander off the path, we become complacent, we sin. But our choice to believe in Jesus is not in question, but the decision to do it, and do so with sincere hearts, with deep love for the Lord and His people.

If Peter's choice, with all his imperfections, his lack of faith when he walked on the waters toward Jesus, his cowardice when Jesus was arrested and his denial of knowing the Lord when He was put on trial, is any indication, what matters most is our decision to love God and follow the Lord wherever He may lead us.

You see, despite Peter's failings, his inadequacies, and yes, his sin --- Peter had one thing that was essential to being a disciple - desire. Peter sincerely wanted to follow Jesus. He wanted to understand what Jesus was telling him. He wanted to

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serve Jesus in any way he could. And because he had that deep desire, God graced him with all that he needed to fulfill his role in God's plan for the world.

And it's no different with us. Make no mistake about it - God didn't simply ask a handful of people two thousand years ago to help him infuse the world with love and mercy and hope. He's asking each of us the same thing this very day. He's inviting us to play our unique role in the drama that continues to unfold. He's providing us with what we need to fulfill what is lack in the Body of Christ.

And so today, on this Sunday, we may not be fully aware of our motivation, but we are here together. We made a good choice. And we do so because we desire to do what God calls us to do, to fill the corners of every home, every heart, every family with God's healing, peace, light, and love. Amen