

6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; Feb. 12th 2023
Sirach 15: 15-20; 1Cor. 2: 6-10; Matthew 5: 17-37

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Our first reading is taken from the Book of Sirach, which is one of the Wisdom Books. It begins with the statement: **“If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and they will save you. If you trust in God, you too will live. Before men are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.”** In this statement the concept of the human free will is strongly depicted. Perhaps the saying in Sirach is the repetition of what Moses had commanded to the Israel. As they were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses summoned the people and put before them a choice. **He says in Deuteronomy 30: 19, “I have set before you, life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life then, that you and your descendants may live.”** We have the freedom of choice to keep the Commandments of God, or not to. Sirach says that we have the choice of water or fire, life or death, good or evil. In other words eternal life or eternal death is our free choice. God will not interfere with our free will, though in his wisdom he shows us a way to make a good choice. Among the creatures only human beings are given the intellect, reasoning and freedom of choice. Only we are able to make decisions. The Book of Genesis gives the reason why we are given this great privilege. **It says in chapter 1:26, “Then God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”** If God takes away our free will we are reduced to the level of animals.

God never created anything else in his image and likeness, but only man and he is given the dominion over all creatures. So it is very clear that man and woman are the most beautiful creation of God and so dear to him. Hence God gave human beings alone the freedom of choice. **We can define choice as the ability to select one course of action from a set of alternatives to achieve a goal.** What is so great about choice is that it transforms us from dumb animals into artists. Many may conclude that the animals too have full freedom of choice and they can do whatever they want and go anywhere they choose and eat whatever they want. But they act by their inborn instincts which will be the same always. For instance, the life style of the deer today is not different from their ancestors who lived 2000 years ago. But human beings can change the life style time to time and choose good or bad each day. It is said that an average person makes choices or decisions 27 times daily.

Though God gave the first parents everything in the Garden of Eden, they were tested for their freedom of choice. Unfortunately they failed in their first test and went for a wrong choice and as the consequence they were kicked out of the Garden and left to earn their daily bread out of their sweat. Thus we can say that the first wrong

choice occurred in the Garden of Eden and it continues through the generations. But as each individual enjoys the freedom of choice we cannot blame Adam and Eve for our wrong choice; nor can we blame the devil for making us choose wrong things.

Our one wrong choice or decision, even simple, can ruin our eternal and material life. On the other hand, our good choice can bring life and prosperity. Please remember during the hunting season many bucks lose their lives not in the fight to have control over 100 acres of grazing land, rather for a carrot or an apple; similarly Adam and Eve lost the luxury of the Eden just for a small fruit, means, for their greed. This is the way people in the modern age forfeit their eternal life, just for an instant gratification or pleasure. **Very often our unhappiness or suffering is the product of our choice and no one should be blamed for that.** As we are social beings, our wrong choice can, not only affect our lives but also the lives of innocent people. As a pastor when I make a wrong decision it is going to affect the community or at least some members; when one of the spouses makes a wrong choice it can even ruin the whole married life; when parents choose their own enjoyment, neglecting the formation of the children, the children are misled; when the rulers make a bad choice the citizens will suffer. We have got number of examples before us for the same.

The consequences of our wrong choices are very often irreversible. Many a time people make the excuses that they didn't know that their particular choice was wrong as we cannot foresee and predict everything in advance. Everybody has ample opportunity to learn about the teachings of Jesus and the Church. Again it is his/her choice to use this opportunity or not to. In today's gospel which is part of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes it very clear that whoever chooses to obey the Commandments and help people to follow them, will be greatest in the kingdom of God. **In fact, a person who chooses Christ and his teachings to be his/her model naturally learns what the right choice he/she has to make.** Because Christ is our light in the darkness and even if we deviate a little from the track we can come to the right path looking at that light. A ship in the outer sea cannot miss the way to the harbor, provided it chooses to give attention to the lighthouse or the radar. *Life is made up of a series of moments that can never be lived again, and the choices we make today will affect us and others in the future- advancing God's purpose or hindering it.* God has given us the freedom of choice, not to choose wrong things rather the right things. The concluding verse of Sirach is important, **"No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin."** It is clear from this verse as what should be our responsibility.