

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I visit with people from other cities, especially those that have professional football teams, I tell them, “Kansas City has a mayor. We also have a king.” Our quarterback possesses exceptional talent, and he has raised the spirit of our team as well as the spirit of our city. At our last Super Bowl one of my brothers complained that we didn’t have red lights on the cathedral at night. I reminded him we have red bricks and a gold dome 24/7.

At this very moment the Kansas City Chiefs are playing in the Super Bowl, and we have chosen to come here for Sunday Mass. For some of you this choice was difficult; for others it didn’t really matter. But each of us made a choice.

Choosing the right thing to do is often difficult. Sometimes we know that one choice is wrong, but it is tempting, and we fall into sin knowing how wrong it is. Other times both choices are good choices. That is a different situation, but it is equally hard.

In today’s gospel Jesus addresses the fulfillment of the law. He guides us to get inside the laws of society and adopt them for our own good and the good of our neighbor. Because the first reading also praises the commandments that come from God, the lectionary today invites us to sing certain verses from Psalm 119 along with the refrain, “Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord.” In a few short words, it lays out a strategy for decision-making. It first invites people to accept the premise that the law of the Lord is good, that doing what God wants will bring personal benefit. It also assumes you can discern what that law is. Sometimes we don’t know clearly the will of God. We’re willing to follow what God wants, but we feel in the dark. Still, if we make these efforts, we will be “blessed” for following God’s law.

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the bible. Our cantor sang 8 short verses, but the whole psalm stretches over 176 verses. Each one states something about God’s law, using a variety of synonyms. Today we hear these: “You have laid down your precepts to be carefully kept. May my ways be firm in keeping your statutes.... Open my eyes that I may see the wonders of your law. Lord, teach me the way of your statutes, and I will keep them to the end.” These verses acknowledge our need to know what God wants so that we may do it.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, one of the greatest spiritual directors in history, frequently helped people who had to make a difficult choice between two good possibilities and wanted to follow what God wanted. He suggested that the way forward was to put oneself in the middle, in a state of perfect balance, in which you could accept either decision based on what God wanted. He advised, consider each choice independently, think about the consequences of adopting it, and then try it the other way, always removing any personal preference, and wanting to choose as a result of prayer what brings glory to God. From Psalm 119, an indecisive person could pray, “Open my eyes, that I may see the wonders of your law.” Then the way forward becomes clearer. And if you ever need to convince yourself that you have the ability to choose the better of two options, you can remember this night. There’s nothing wrong with watching the Chiefs in the Super Bowl, but coming to Mass is a better choice.

Sunday, February 12, 2023