

*The Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*February 12, 2023*  
*Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant*

*“Question 129 – Do not men differ in many things? Answer – Men differ in many things, such as learning, wealth, power, etc.; but these things belong to the world and not man’s nature. He came into this world without them, and he will leave it without them. Only the consequences of good or evil done in this world will accompany men to the next.”*

*(Baltimore Catechism vol. 3)*

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Sirach, specifically 15:15-20. It begins with three words upon which our faith life rests – **“If you choose.”** I will attempt to make a case this weekend to show that it is choice, a daily continual reasoned choice, which defines us as Christians, as Catholics.

I begin with a story of a paradox. I once met a person who identified as “pro-choice.” As I questioned the use of this wording, in relation to how it would be properly understood, the person unknowingly admitted to being rather “anti-choice.” They did not want others to have the opportunity to freely educate themselves and arrive at their own conclusions. The circular argument/explanation of “Do what I tell you, why, because I said so” often dominates this way of thinking. As parents, you know only too well how this approach so often fails in the end, when dealing with your teenagers. Honestly, even now, I find this explanation as grating as fingernails on the blackboard. Why is this the case? Because this line, knowingly or unknowingly, has the purpose of diminishing another’s use of their reason.

Our Reason (Thought) is a great gift from God. It unites us to Him as our soul is united to our body. We must first define our Reason by stating clearly – reason is not smartness. It is not an intelligence measured by tests, grades, or degrees. Reason, our ability to think as God does, begins with sense knowledge. We acquire knowledge of the world around us by the use of our senses. Through this natural sense knowledge, we can begin to understand the effects of choices made. For example, we may watch a video of a devastating wildfire through a wooded neighborhood. In the video we see the effects of the fire. We hear stories from witnesses of the fire. Our memories will recall our own experiences of fire. We may remember how the heat felt or the smell of wood being consumed. This sense knowledge informs us of the effects of fire, but it is our reason, our thought, which seeks to understand the root cause of the wildfire. What action caused the fire – man or nature? What choices were made which either aided in the spread of the fire or assisted in extinguishing the blaze? Only after using our reason can we formulate an answer. And, lest I fail to mention, our reasoned answer may or may not be accepted because individuals have the freedom to choose.

This scenario illustrates, I hope, why reason (thought) is of utmost importance in helping us to establish choice. We can all agree that we are bombarded daily with external stimuli which may cloud our choices. People will receive handsome salaries who create witty advertisements which could lead to increased revenue for a company or product brand. Recall famous Super Bowl commercials which often influenced a generation akin to my generation's often quoted ad from Wendy's restaurants – "Where's the Beef?"

As I said in the opening, it is reasoned choice which defines us as Christians. My conclusion is based upon all of my sense data collected, filtered through my reason (my ability to think/ponder/consider/reflect upon), which ultimately leads to my making a choice. My informed choice, therefore, demands an action on my part. Either my actions will affirm my informed choice or they will not; there is no in between. This can be doubly hard when we speak of a lived Christian life in a world where the stimuli of pleasures and emotions shift more than sand in an hourglass. For one to say – "I choose to be a Christian" – this is not enough; it has never been enough. We cannot make one universal statement hoping it will continue to hold firm as we daily encounter new stimuli. Nor can we entice others to inform their own choices if we fail to offer them the means to do so. And the means best used to convince ourselves and others that we are Christians is to daily choose to be a Christian. We must continually choose to be a Christian while the world around us daily shouts out how wrong our choice of being a Christian is.

May I offer you one point to consider as you go about your week? Christianity, Catholicism in particular, has existed for roughly two thousand years. In that time, we have been blessed with some of the greatest minds ever to grace this planet all seeking to order their lives in accordance with the words and laws of their Savior, Jesus Christ. If we could encapsulate the lives of all those individuals, their combined knowledge with the teachings of God in the Bible both Old and New Testaments, and first oral, later written Tradition of Christianity and place it here, right in front of you, do you think it would be enough to inform reasons and motivate some of our fellows to fully embrace the Christian life therefore attending church on Sunday? I would offer a resounding "No!" Why do I feel I can confidently say that? Because everything needed to inform and convince has always been here right in front of you in our tabernacle.