

What are we going to choose?

“**Not to choose is to choose**”. Can’t for the life of me remember who wrote this, but I often come back to it. We can’t not choose, because that is a choice. All day long we are making choices of one sort or another, some are quite innocuous while others are fundamental. For example – I go to the doctor who tells me I must go down in weight. So, I ask what to do. Reduce sugar intake, I don’t add sugar to tea or coffee I respond. Then eat less chocolate. I can’t do that, I tell the doctor. Eat less pizza or pasta says the doctor. No way. Go to the gym says the doctor. You must be joking I say. Finally, I am told to speak to the Funeral Director. Not yet I say. These are all choices and clearly not choosing is to choose. We all choose one way or another.

Of course, the Old Testament reading today is quite well known – the first version of what we call the Ten Commandments, which could be better translated as “The Ten Words” or “The Ten sayings” (=Decalogue). And the Gospel reading is Jesus cleansing the Temple, and in John’s Gospel this happens at the very beginning, and not at the end of the story, as it does in the other Gospels. Both readings present us with a picture of how to live God’s way, and both remind us what to choose in life (and in a way this connects to last week’s Reflection, when the theme was what it means to be a Christian).

I hope we can find perspectives in both these readings which will help us think, will challenge us, will nurture us on the way; because Lent is a journey we are on, which is asking us questions, and inviting us to develop and to grow in both faith and commitment.

The Exodus reading begins with God choosing, and this first verse is central to the whole theme: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;”. God is making it very clear that all that follows is a transition from *slavery to freedom*, and who doesn’t want to be free? But freedom is not easy, because it also means a degree of responsibility for the choices we make. And what follows becomes the picture of what God wants for us: how to live God’s way, which we call the Ten Commandments.

Interestingly most of these commandments begin with “**You shall not**”, only the Sabbath and Parents are not set out negative. But is God providing us a picture in the negative? *Don’t do this, don’t do that*. I honestly believe this is not God’s way at all. I believe God is inviting us to consider all these as a positive way forward, based on a new and different way of life: be honest, be respectful, be caring, be faithful, be truthful...

God is challenging us to choose a life of abundance of love and hope as different from being caught up in the ways of the world; this is why most commandments are in the negative (= what NOT to do), and when we look at them today we can recognize in each of them the so called gods our times has created: political, social or cultural idols - sexism, racism, militarism, legalism, fundamentalism, religionism, imperialism, commercialism....and I am sure you can think of some other ones. We can see these everywhere and this is why God invites us to choose a different way, from the slavery of these realities (idols) to freedom of God is the liberator. It’s a journey from the negative to the positive. **We know what we should not do, so then, do we choose what we should do?**

One of my professors, a great protestant Latin-American theologian taught us that “to believe in God we must not believe in the gods we fabricate, we have to become atheist of such gods..., we create our own gods that will defend our interests, to justify our needs, to save us the trouble of working for a better world. So only those who are passionate atheists of these gods can be true Christians”¹. This is the challenge we are called to embark on, and this is why we are always facing choices: who to follow, what not to follow, who to believe, what to reject.

¹ Jose Miguez Bonino: Espacio para ser hombres.

This helps us understand why Jesus comes across as so furious in the text in the Gospel - even with a whip in his hand...What Jesus sees in the temple is the way it has been changed from a place of worship to a marketplace. And how did this come to happen? Simply because most people did not have access to the pure animals for sacrifice, and anything unworthy was not accepted. Or people didn't have the currency of the temple, only the legal tender currency with the face of the emperor on it, and that was not considered fit for the Temple, so the tables were set up, and the people had to buy the animal for sacrifice, or the currency for the Temple offering, only from those places, but be sure to pay the established price for that. This is what sets Jesus off, what he sees is the Temple become the centre of one of the idols of the time: commercialism. A place where it was no longer central to meet with others and worship God. No longer a holy place.

Jesus reacts and take a close look at vs 15: he doesn't expel the people from the Temple, he liberates the animals and scatters the money, overturning the tables. Jesus' choses to (re)turn the Temple to a place of worship, so no wonder the people that made a comfortable living from the temple commerce rejected him. His choice was against their choice. And he goes one step further... "destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days". This is not a building project, but a life project. It reminds us that a building is not the centre - remember the Temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed by Titus in the year 70. The centre was God. And by now we know well enough that though we like going to church, for nearly a year we have not been able to do this in the Temple, but this has not made worship impossible. Jesus we are told, is talking about himself, and his death and resurrection. This is the axis for understanding our faith choices.

In this sense these two readings are very apt for our Lent journey. They remind us of the choices we can make, of the priorities we establish. And last Wednesday when reading "**Fresh from the Word**" Bible notes the reading was from John 13, and it really hit me hard, because I was also preparing this Reflection. John 13: 34/35: "***I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another***". So, how are we choosing to love? Will everyone know we are disciples of Jesus by how we love? And who aren't we loving? Who is being left out of our gathering? Love means sharing what we are, who we are, what is important to us. In the light of this, what would make us as cross as Jesus in the Gospel reading, what does the way from slavery to freedom look like for us, our community, the world in these times?

The way we live our faith can have a positive impact on the life of others for so, so long; but it can also damage others for just as long. So how do our choices bless community? How are we beacons of Hope in these times? Finally, and connecting with last week's Reflection: who do we serve/follow? Christ as God choose or as the world tries to mould the way?

Collect for the third Sunday of Lent: Lord of the overturning, your passion sweeps away the calculating religion, the pious profiteering which kept us safely outside the holy places: may we find our way through the debris of all that protected us to find your dangerous heart and our world upside down; through Jesus Christ, our exiled Lord. Amen.

(Prayers for an inclusive Church)

Join Zoom Meeting Tuesday 9th at 2.00 pm.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87245993130?pwd=eUdiMXVTNHNISStrcm9mS1RINzR2Zz09>

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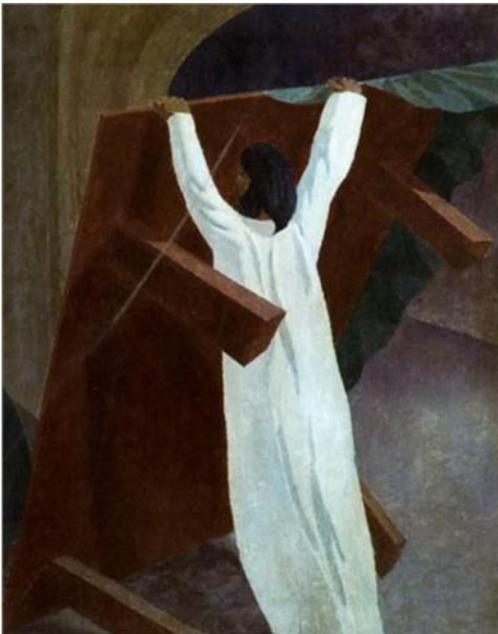
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Paintings that can help us reflect on the Bible passages- Exodus 20; 1-17 John 2; 13-22

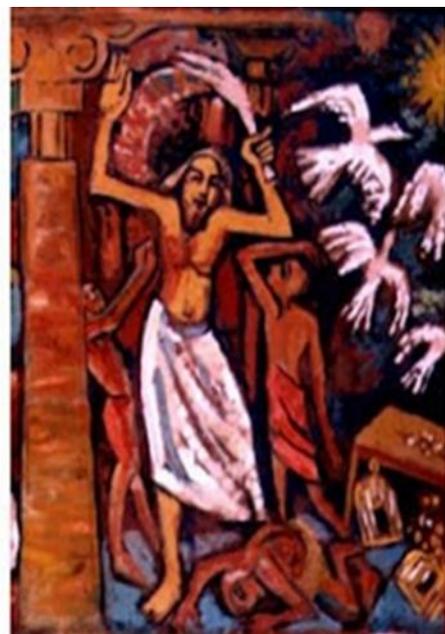
Marc Chagall. Moses and the Commandments



Jesus cleansing the Temple.



Stanley Spencer (UK)



Jyoti Art Ashram (India)