

WHAT WILL OUR ANSWER BE - YES OR NO?

One never reflects on it, but almost daily the ordinary person has to make decisions every day, most of which are not necessarily important ones but simply ordinary decisions which make up the flow of ordinary life. Very little if any reflection is used just simply common sense or perhaps with some minor reflection on how a yes or no will affect one's day. And most of these decisions are simply a yes or a no. The three readings today all in one way or another involve yes or no decisions. In the first reading taken from the first book of Kings we hear how the prophet Elijah calls Elisha to be a prophet to succeed him. Elisha answers with a yes, but wants to first tell his Father and Mother and then he will follow Elijah. His yes was a qualified "Yes", which Elijah agreed to. In those days, saying farewell to one's family always involved some sort of going away party, a feast. It was not just a goodbye and that was it. No. Elisha was plowing a field with twelve yoke of oxen! That in itself makes one stand in awe. He slaughters all the oxen and then takes all the yokes and starts perhaps one of the largest barbeques ever recorded! (One parishioner here claims this makes Elisha the patron saint of barbeques!) After the feast (which by custom lasted several days) Elisha joins Elijah, and shortly after, as Elijah is taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, Elijah throws his cloak over Elisha, a sign that he is now the prophet of Israel as Elijah had been, with all the powers he had possessed. The yes of Elisha was a wholehearted yes to God, Elisa not knowing what the future held.

To give a yes or a no answer is not always as easy as one would like, for invariably one's answer will involve giving of one's self in some way or another. This is particularly true of a yes answer which will usually involve some sort of time given or some sort of work done. A yes answer can be very Christian and can in a real way manifest one's commitment to helping others. On the other hand, a no answer often involves one's faith, living that faith, having a commitment to one's God and to one's personal faith. That being the case, one can understand how difficult it might be to simply say no! It is simply hard to say no in so many cases. Adam and Eve could not say no to the Devil's simple prodding to disregard the order of God and not eat of the fruit of the tree. They wanted to believe the Devil when he claimed that eating the fruit would make them equal to God, yet they also knew that God had commanded them not to eat. The temptation was overwhelming and finally they rationalized the facts and chose not to say no but rather chance it that just maybe the Devil was right. They would not say no and the result that the perfect creation of God began to unravel. Sin had now entered into the world, into the universe. When God questioned them they tried to put the blame outside themselves, Adam blaming eve, Eve blaming the Serpent, the devil. But the damage had been done and they could not, could never, repair it or undo it. But then in the Easter Vigil liturgy, the priest sings in the preface, "O Happy Fault!" (the sin of Adam) for from that came the unbelievable love of God in becoming a man so that as man who was also God, the original sin would be wiped away and the original order of the universe would be restored. However, the effects of the sin would still be felt, but now God's power would work through human weakness to ultimately achieve his goal, an eternity of happiness of all humans in the kingdom of God. The power of God's love is infinite.

A simple no would have so changed the whole world, the whole course of history. Yet at the same time, their yes did change history. All this simply shows that the power of God is invincible. Today's culture which is totally materialistic and hedonistic, affords unlimited opportunities to choose between a yes or a no. There is as part of every human which wants to say yes, wants to believe the lie that one can be totally happy all the time. But there is also a part of every human involving their faith, or their hope in God, which very often helps them

to say no. Saying yes always seems to be the better choice, though sometimes it might very well be that. But the reverse is also true, that a no will guard one's yes for something much better. I once read someplace that Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, once said that "our success comes from saying 'no' to 1,000 things to make sure we don't get on the wrong track or try to do too much. I'm as proud of what we don't do as I am of what we do." Now there is something to ponder!

In today's Gospel we hear various answers to God's call through his Son. The whole Samaritan town said a resounding no to Jesus simply stopping there for a rest. Their hatred for the Jews was real and unabated with no exceptions. They certainly missed a wonderful opportunity. Such no answers are still given today to God in more places than one can count. Yet God will never give up. And then there are the examples in this same reading of those who personally said no to Jesus. There were three successive would-be followers of Jesus who asked to be his followers, but once Jesus pointed out the hardships they would have to endure. Jesus didn't want simple numbers; he wanted dedication coupled with hardships and perhaps even some pain. Their no made Jesus sad. They were good people for he wanted those who had counted the cost and were willing to take up his cross. And there was even one person whom Jesus gave a personal invitation to follow him, saying to him "follow me!" This was the same call that all the Apostles had responded to with such enthusiasm. But in this case, he had other more important concerns. That happened once before when Jesus asked a young man to follow him, but he had many possessions and just could not give them up. His no also made Jesus sad.

Perhaps in most people's minds, a call from God, from Christ, to come follow him means one is called to a "higher" life of being a priest or a religious. That is absolutely not true. The fact is that God calls everyone, no exceptions, to follow him, to use their own talents and abilities in his service, to help him spread his invitation not verbally, but rather through their example of living what they believe. They are to be model men and women, model parents, model workers, model citizens, all in their own way and in their own professions or work, letting God work through them to be totally present in every conceivable place on this planet. It is ordinary people, men and women, even the young, who if united with their God and Savior are modern day Apostles spreading the good news just as it happened in the very early day of our Church and of our faith.

Our Church, the Catholic Church, was founded by Jesus and then spread through his Apostles and then through their successors and more and more through the ages through ordinary people of every walk and manner of life. We are all in this together, all called by Christ, all who have in one way or another said yes. For many it may have been a wavering or an uncertain yes. For many others it was at first a no. But one must never underestimate the love and the power of God and of his Son. Many have first said yes but then in time, began to change and many have become the finest ambassadors of Christ possible, touching the lives of so many beyond the realm of priests. The personal call of Christ will only end when time ends.

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