

Sunday, September 7, 2025 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The First Reading, Psalm, and Gospel all present us with a choice – whether to choose life by loving and obeying God, or to choose death by rejecting God.

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Deutero Nomos – second law

Before the Israelites enter into the Promised Land from the east side of the Jordan River, after forty years in the wilderness, and before turning the reins of leadership over to Joshua, Moses reminds the people of where they have been, how far they have come, what God has done for them, and what God expects of them now.

Has there been a time in your life when you needed to undertake this kind of deep, personal inventory?

If so, what was it like? What was the result? Do you need to do that right now?

15-16 - See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

17-18 - But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19-20 - I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Psalm: Psalm 1

1-3 - Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful! Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and they meditate on God's teaching day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.

Riparian areas in Arizona – Verde River – Verde Canyon Railroad

4-6 - It is not so with the wicked; they are like chaff which the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, nor the sinner in the council of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall be destroyed.

Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

25, 27 - Now large crowds were traveling with (Jesus). He turned and said to them, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

28-30 - "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Assisted living facility in San Dimas, CA

31-32 – “Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.”

Some have interpreted Jesus as talking about not the need for people to count the cost before saying they want to follow Jesus, but instead His own need to determine how truly dedicated and committed His followers actually are. (v. 25 – Large crowds were traveling with Jesus.)

Second Reading: Philemon 1-21

Some people have been very critical of Paul and the Bible because he sends Onesimus back to Philemon rather than takes on the institution of slavery in the Roman empire.

But what chance would the Christian church have at this point to eliminate slavery?

Efforts by Christians later, such as William Wilberforce in England (late 1700's/early 1800's) and the Christian Abolitionists in the United States before the Civil War.

Paul does not take on the institution of slavery, but he does change the relationship between Philemon (slave owner) and Onesimus (slave).

Onesimus has a responsibility to Philemon. Philemon has a responsibility to Onesimus.

Colossians 4: 9 – (Tychicus) is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.

1-2 - Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, and to the church in your house.

3-5 - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus.

8-10 - I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.

11-14 - Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

15-16 - Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother.

17-20 - So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.