

HOMILY

Deacon Jim Byrne

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20; 1 John 4:11-16; John 17:11b-19

St. Francis of Assisi R.C. Church

Greenlawn, NY

May 20, 2012



A recent report from Reuters stated:

In the small Texas town of Wolfforth, Texas, a city council election there came down to a coin toss on Friday. After church administrator Bruce MacNair and banker Bryan Studer wrapped up last Saturday's election

with 118 votes each, the men agreed to settle the town's first electoral tie with the flip of a coin. A special election to decide a winner would have cost "north of \$10,000.00," said Darrell Newsom, city manager of Wolfforth, population 3,600, which is southwest of Lubbock in the Texas Panhandle. "That's a lot of money for a small town like this," Newsom said. "These two guys have to be commended for settling this in a civic-minded and painless fashion." First, Newsom said the men had to sign a three-page document laying out the rules of the coin toss. It specified that a \$1 U.S. coin was to be "tossed in the air in the manner used by officials prior to a football game." Each man drew slips of paper, with MacNair drawing heads and Studer drawing tails. Then with Newsom flipping the coin, heads it was. MacNair won. Studer took his loss well, Newsom said, shaking hands with MacNair and wishing the councilman-elect luck in his new post. "These are west Texas guys," Newsom said. "That's the way we do things here."

Wow! Sounds like a real manly way of settling a serious decision, with Studer accepting his loss by the toss of a coin which has no bearing or relationship with his ability or value to serve as a city councilman.

I wonder how Matthias and Barsabbas (not to be confused with Barabbas) felt about their situation, also determined by the drawing of lots. I wonder what they felt about their future, their perceived value and worth being decided by the toss of a coin. While Matthias is selected to be the 12th apostle, there is no further mention of him or the loser, Barsabbas, in Sacred Scripture.

These two followers of Christ who were qualified according to the selection criteria laid down as followers of Jesus from his baptism to his ascension, must have been intrigued that their future would depend upon the toss of a coin, a simple act of fate that would determine their futures and the future of the Church. I wonder what they really thought and felt about that process, that selection and the outcome.

I wonder how many times, when I look back on my life, I was equally intrigued about decisions I made, or which were made for me – decisions that radically or subtly altered my life to the extent that I am here now talking about it. At my age I can reflect upon many such decisions. For example, the decision to marry and raise a family instead of joining the Holy Ghost missionaries; a decision to relocate first to England and then to the US where we established our home and raised our family; a decision to pursue a more personal relationship with my Creator and become an ordained minister; a decision to pursue my commitment to the sick and dying and become a hospital chaplain. That's my journey and when I look back upon it I never cease to be amazed at the direction my life has taken. Forty years ago I would never have guessed that we would be here today talking about it in this place. Twelve years ago I would have ridiculed the suggestion that I would be a Deacon, an ordained minister in the Church.

I know everyone has similar experiences – a series of decisions leading to where you are right now, whether you believe you alone made the decisions or not. For some it may have been a decision to forgo a family and remain to take care of an aging and ailing relative; or a feeling of necessity to be near a troubled relative or family member who was not receiving the required assistance. For others, it may have been an inability to escape the environment and dependencies to live and grow in fresh pastures. However, we can all admit that we are unable to fully control our destinies, and that we are subject to forces beyond our control, beyond our understanding, appreciation or influence. When decisions that affect us are made by our family, our managers, supervisors, or close friends, do we always understand what is happening? Do we appreciate that someone else is making decisions about our futures, the future of our families, our livelihoods, decisions about who goes to college and where, decisions that govern the remainder of our lives. Do we think that these decisions could be influenced by our creator, by God?

First, do we even admit to ourselves that God could affect our lives in a material way? Sure, God could cause a flood or earthquake that would radically alter my life. However, would God act so subtly by putting a slow motorist in front of me when driving fast so that I would not be involved in a fatal accident? Can I look back at the many decision points in my life and see a guiding hand in the decisions that were made and the outcomes of those decisions? Can I see the subtle hand of God guiding and shaping me to be the person he wants me to be, to live the life that he wants me to live, to follow his commandments and follow the path he is laying out for me? Dare we even think that God put people in our lives to fulfill his will, that there are no coincidences? What if God is a lot more active in your life than you give credit? What if you are here now, for example, because of a life-altering procedure that saved your life, because a major event, happy or sad, occurred in your life and you felt that you needed to be here – could God have been involved in that at all?

When visiting the elderly and aged in their homes or at hospitals, I frequently witness surrender to the Lord, to a recognition that the ways of the world are not those of God. This can be a tough and difficult point to get across to young families and individuals at times. For example, the decision may be the difference between attendance at prestigious universities for the children or attendance at a local community college and giving alms to the poor; it may be the difference between vacation each year at popular resorts or having family picnics in the back yard and feeding the poor; it may be the difference between hosting a sweet sixteen or Bar Mitzvah party or, instead, going to McDonalds for a burger and feeding the hungry. We are called to think about what is important, what is meaningful, and what is relevant in our lives. Just as Peter and the other Apostles did before the election of Matthias, we can and should pray to God for assistance, for the wisdom to make decisions that are good and right.

Matthias was selected as the replacement of Judas and completed the circle of 12. We believe that eleven of the twelve apostles met violent deaths, the sole exception being John. They were in the right place, at the right time, with the right attitude and open hearts, ready to hear and follow Jesus, the Word of God. They decided rightfully to follow Christ instead of the lures of the world. Can we do the same? Can we actually call ourselves Christians – followers of Christ in thought, word, and deed, even knowing the personal, political, and social difficulties that it may incur? We are constantly arriving at crossroads and we have to choose. Dare we choose the right path to follow Christ or will we instead reject Christ by selecting the more glamorous, the easier path that can lead to eternal damnation? Can we decide to follow all the teachings of the Church or will we cherry-pick those that appeal to us and reject those that clash

with our lifestyles? Will we stand up for the Church's teachings at all times in all places, or will we timidly keep our thoughts and decisions to ourselves, preferring to be unnoticed and non-controversial? The road to Heaven is not easy, but by following Jesus and with God's grace, we can travel it. The question at hand, then, is ours to decide – will we follow Christ or not? God who gave us the freedom to choose and this decision is ours to make. Let us pray that we make the right choice!