

“Therefore Choose Life, that You and Your Descendants May Live”

The month of January takes its name from the Roman god, “Janus” who is depicted with two faces, each looking in the opposite direction. One face looks at the year just ended while the other looks at the new year just starting. Many people make the famous “New Year’s Resolutions” whereby they look at the past year in order to make a change they think necessary for the new year. It’s a time to take stock of one’s life.

In this spirit we can hearken back to the Chosen People as they are encamped on the plains of Moab preparing to cross into the Promised Land. Moses addresses them and calls them to look back at the recent past: their enslavement in Egypt, the miracles that God wrought to free them in the Exodus, and the giving of the Covenant (Ten Commandments) on Mt. Sinai. Moses then exhorts them to be faithful to God’s Covenant so that they will prosper in this new land which they will occupy. The Chosen People now must take stock: learn from the past as they look to the future. You find this in the Book of Deuteronomy, which means “Second Law” and has the style of a long sermon or homily. Central to its message are the following words of Moses:

“See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of

the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord will bless you...

But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day that **you shall perish**...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore **choose life**, that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:15-19).

Every January we, like the Chosen People, are reminded of this choice that God sets before us. In the “Didache” (one of the earliest Christian works; written in the 1st century) we find, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death: and great is the difference between the two ways.” Do we choose God’s Covenant of Life or our present-day Culture of Death with its killing of the pre-born in the womb (abortion); the infanticide of deformed, newborn babies; and the euthanizing of those deemed unfit or, as the Nazis said, “life unworthy of life” (Terry Schiavo). Each January 22nd reminds us of the choices confronting us. As Moses reminded the



Moses breaking the tables of the Law
—Gustave Doré

Chosen People, so too, today Our Lord Jesus Christ, the new Moses, teaches us through His Church that we must choose life or ultimately perish.

Upon entering the Promised Land, the Israelites had to confront an entrenched culture of death personified in the Canaanite deities of Baal and Moloch. While different cults, they shared the common bond of child sacrifice. A hole would be cut into the statue, a fire lit, and the child thrown into the fire. This widespread practice greatly pressured the Israelites of both kingdoms (Israel – the Northern; and Judah – the Southern) “to get with it” and become “mainstreamed.” Many of God’s people succumbed to the temptation even though God expressly forbade it; *“There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or daughter as an offering”* (Deut. 18:10). This corruption spread through the political institutions, several kings sacrificed their sons; many priests did likewise, thinking that you could sacrifice your children and be a good priest. God warned them through the Prophets:

“For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight; they have set their abominations in the house which is called by name, to defile it. They have built the high place...to burn their sons and daughters in the fire; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind” (Jer. 7:30). In fact God makes it very clear that they are not sacrificing their children to gods, who don’t exist, but are, in reality, worshiping demons; *“With abominable practices they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons which were no gods”* (Deut. 32: 16-17).

Finally, to end this murderous abomination, God permitted the Israelites to experience the consequences of their choice: national calamity. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and completely destroyed it and its Ten Tribes, forever lost to history. In 689 B.C., the Babylonians invaded the Southern Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem, and carried off the population to Babylon. After a 70 year exile, the people returned and the abomination ended.

From the experience of the Chosen People, we can learn some important lessons in our confrontation with our modern Culture of Death. First of all, we see that complacency kills the spiritual life; the life of grace. Because of their desire

to “fit in” (be mainstreamed) with the surrounding culture, the Chosen People forgot their unique vocation: to be God’s Holy People and a “light onto the Gentiles.” As with them, our modern day desire to “be up-to-date” can be fatal to the vocation each one of us received at our Baptism: to be the “Light of Christ.” How do we become complacent? By making an idol out of lifestyle or the “I have to do it **MY WAY**” syndrome. In our never-ending pursuit of materialism, upward mobility and feel-good experiences, we have come to regard certain groups of people, e.g., the pre-born and severely disabled, as aggressors to our pursuit of happiness. Two out of every three abortions are performed for the reason that the baby is seen as interfering with a career or schooling. We no longer see all people as bearing the image of God.

Like the Chosen People, we have fallen into the secularist trap, which separates God from daily life, resulting in indifference which becomes “practical atheism.” As Brother Francis Mary Kalvelage FI writes: “Contrary to the Church’s clear teaching on pro-life issues, the majority of Catholics vote consistently for pro-abortion candidates. It all comes down to a lack of commitment, subscribing to the erroneous standards of the world, ‘if it feels right for me it must be alright.’” Dr. Charles Rice of the Notre Dame University School of Law states it succinctly: “Legalized abortion and euthanasia are essentially symptoms of a loss of faith in God. They are religious issues.” Exactly what happened to the Chosen People.

As Moses exhorted the people to choose life, Our Lord continually exhorts us to choose the way of life through His Vicar on earth (the Pope) and through the lives and witness of the saints. In this month of January we can turn especially to St. Maximilian Kolbe, patron saint of the Pro-Life Movement. He sacrificed his very life because he saw the image of his Lord in a man condemned to death. “Greater love no man hath than to lay down his life for his friend.” Here lies the weapon to wield against the culture of death: sacrificial love. Sacrifice, that word so hated by our modern popular culture, characterizes true love. Are we willing to sacrifice that time to attend Holy Mass as frequently as possible? “Wasting time”, as Archbishop Fulton Sheen would say, adoring Our Lord in the Blessed

Sacrament is the hallmark of one in love with Our Lord. As Fr. John Corapi would say, it is the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament that will “drive out the smoke of Satan.” In this fight the Rosary is an indispensable weapon (it’s the monks’ “sword”). Certain devils are only driven out by “prayer and fasting”: spiritual growth is impossible without mortification. Like David against Goliath, we have some pretty powerful stones in our pouch.

Remember, the Culture of Death has already lost.

Why? Because Our Lord will return again and destroy it forever. *“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”* (Apoc. 20:14). In Most Holy Trinity Monastery, we pray daily at the Divine Liturgy and in our adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament for the pre-born, the disabled and all those in danger from the Culture of Death. We pray that all may heed the call of the “New Moses”, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to “choose Life.” ✠