

August 26, 2012, 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
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[Joshua 24:1-2, 15-17, 18](#); [Psalms 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21, 22-23](#); [Ephesians 5:21-32](#); and [John 6:60-69](#)

Ciudad Juárez, the great city of north central Mexico, where I lived in the late 2000s, has more than two million inhabitants. With its sister city of El Paso, Texas, across the international border, it is situated in the vast Chihuahua Desert. The stark geography of this part of the world is a constant reminder to me of the harsh choices people make, especially the choices of many young people who can scarcely make a living.

Constantly, the temptation is there to join others in the lucrative drug trade without weighing all the consequences. How soon will they and their families be involved as victims in this business? Will they find themselves looking for those to be assassinated or will they, themselves be the ones assassinated? Choices can make the difference between life and death on all levels of our physical and spiritual existence.

The Word of God today affirms that choice is at the very root of our lives. Our choices need to be seen in the light of God's gracious choice to love us. This is the mighty ray of hope that the gospel offers us, however severe our situation may be. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is constantly drawing all of us to life, no matter what bleak prisons we may have made for ourselves. Because of God's choice to constantly offer the free gift of grace to the most needy, we can wake from our sleep, from the illusions of happiness that this world offers. At this very moment we can choose life in its fullness. I know people in Juárez that have made this choice; they willingly follow Jesus, carrying their crosses, dying to themselves and those choices that counter to God's reign on Earth.

Throughout the sixth chapter of John's gospel that has been proclaimed to us these past five Sundays, Jesus dares to reveal how exceedingly great God's plan is for those of us who decide to follow the gospel. God has devised a way for Jesus to be with us in a way that we can experience him every Sunday – by partaking of his body and blood, soul and divinity as food and drink. Our gospel passage states that many of Jesus' followers found this to be a hard saying and they decided at that occasion to part from his company. Those of us who are Catholic or Orthodox Christians have chosen the fundamental truth of Christ's words. Yet aren't we just as astounded as the other disciples of Jesus' time to this mystery that is being presented to us? Could the Father's love be so seemingly incredible that we are offered this sacrament?

A friend who was also a very devout member of a non-denominational church sincerely confided that she thought I was very fortunate to have the faith to believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Her words to me were like those of Joshua in the first reading. She left me with a challenge – how do I choose to practice my faith in reference to this great wonder of divine love? Judas chose to physically stay with Jesus, but what were the other choices of his heart?

The reading from the letter to the Ephesians speaks of choice. Even though husbands and wives have vowed to live together, forming a Christian family, they have the daily decision of being mutually submissive to one another out of reverence to Christ. How far does this submissiveness go? The husband is enjoined to offer his life for his wife, as Christ did for his Church. That's another hard saying and only the grace of God can help spouses to live it out.

Let us continue our celebration of the Holy Eucharist knowing that the choice that God has made to personally love us as sons and daughters draws us every moment to Christ. With this inspiration, God leaves it up to us to choose today as the day of salvation and to make the choices that count not only for us, but for the peace and wellbeing of the world.

This reflection was originally published in 2009.