

CHOOSING ALLEGIANCES

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Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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If you've ever seen *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, you'll remember the episode when the Nazi collaborator receives from a number of cups the one he thought was the Holy Grail—the cup of Christ at the Last Supper—and drank from it, expecting to receive immortality. Whoops; wrong one. He aged and was pulverized immediately, upon which the ancient knight quips: "He chose...poorly." Yeah ... thanks for the tip. ([VIDEO](#))

We all make a gazillion choices during each day—what to eat, what to wear, work decisions, etc. We decide by what we believe benefits us the most. Will this route get me to work faster? Will these clothes be appropriate? Will I be kind, or haughty in self-righteous arrogance? Hmmm ... decisions, decisions....

Now, a choice is pretty much assumed is that which benefits family, which in turn benefits ourselves—caring for those whom we love, and who in turn make us happy and content. Much of that is instinctive, some of it by association. A mother and father have one of the strongest of bonds for children brought forth from their own bodies. Brothers and sisters more by long familial associations. Uncles, aunts ... cousins, etc., on down the line. And, of course, spouses, sharing life and closest intimacy.

So when we come to a very poignant passage of the Gospels when Jesus is told that some of His family is waiting to see Him, we take special note: "A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'" (Mark 3:32-35)

Some people mistakenly interpret Jesus as spurning His family, but that is certainly not the case; it would be sinful for one thing, especially toward His mother. Jesus was rather saying that those who follow the will of God are as close—or even closer—to Him than mere blood relations, for such faithful are true family.

That episode certainly is meant to be applied to Christian life; God didn't inspire such a striking story simply that it be passed over. We think also of Jesus' words: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..." (Matthew 10:37)

This may sound harsh to the non-Christian ear, but when we think of whom Christians believe Jesus is—God—it really should be simply assumed and expected, for Christians (and Jews and Muslims) believe God to be the provider of all good, and it would simply—and obviously—be ingratitude to love a gift more than the giver—especially the greatest gifts possible: not only earthly life, but eternal life.

Thus, we need to choose allegiances wisely, for strictly worldly allegiances here pass into insignificance in eternity ... no more important than whether we preferred chocolate or banana pudding when we were infants. Whether American, Irish, Russian, Nigerian, Chilean, Thai ... whether we like the Cowboys, the Broncos, the Raiders, the Red Sox, the Bulls ... red or green chile ... will not matter to us an iota in 1,000, 10,000, 100,000 years from now in our eternity ... recalling that final verse of "Amazing Grace":

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

But what WILL matter—to the nth degree—is only how we've loved God and loved our neighbor, and how we put that love into action.

Our Heavenly reward is to accord with our efforts as we see in Luke 19 in Jesus' parable about a king who rewarded his servants according to their fruitfulness, and in many verses very similar to "And the dead were judged according to their works..." (Revelation 20:12). Obviously, people have different gifts and abilities, but we need to recognize and leverage our own gifts for the common good. Yet it would seem that eternal reward be not so much in accord with measurable productivity as more with sincerity, dedication and strength of effort. As Mother Teresa said: "God doesn't call us to be successful, only to be faithful."

Very often people want to assume a preferred persona that our culture admires, whether it be cowboy, or tough guy, or "bad boy," sex symbol, etc., or choose allegiances for poor motives. Even many Christians, for instance, take on the arrogant aspect of grudge: "When someone wrongs me, I never forgive...or forget!" ... somehow thinking such an attitude admirable, though completely contrary to the teaching of Jesus. But consideration should always be what benefits in eternity.

Many of us who are in the last third of earthly life find ourselves musing increasingly about what we have produced ... what difference will we have made, lamenting time wasted in this-or-that pointless pursuit. Will I go before the Lord with fruits of labor, or simply return with that which I was entrusted to invest ... and yet buried in the ground? To be remembered seems important in our present mortal coil, but the dead couldn't care less about statues or plaques or medals; they care only whether they have furthered good in the world ... how well they have loved God and neighbor.

So, let us always ally ourselves with good ... to lay up treasure in Heaven, remembering St. Paul: "...the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:19-22) By heeding this and the other teachings of virtue, at the end of life we will hear, not those words of the knight to the Nazi collaborator, but rather those to the hero: "You have chosen...wisely."