

How many of you have been asked or told to read books you did not choose? This is especially true in High School or College literature classes. Some of the books were real groaners, others were fascinating looks into the common threads of our humanity.

Two books stand out for me from college: *The Scarlett Letter*, and *Middlemarch*. In both there were decisions to be made. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Arthur Dimmesdale struggles to decide to accept his responsibility toward Hester Prin. And in *Middlemarch*, the two main characters must decide whom to marry; sadly, both marriages turn out badly.

*Middlemarch* gave me a guiding quote for life, both in vocation discernment and daily doings. George Elliott penned it. “Not to decide is to decide.” (repeat). This quote was on the bulletin board over my desk, or as a tent upon my desk, for a number of years.

The readings today brought this quote flooding to mind. Each reading urges decisions to be made and lived.

Our first reading is from the Book of Joshua. Joshua has succeeded Moses after the 40 years desert journey. Throughout

the book, he leads the people into the promised land. Our reading, from the final chapter, presents an aged Joshua laying before the people a decision to be made. He asks: Whom shall you serve? Joshua declares his decision. The people, at length as we heard, echo it.

Some scripture scholars believe this account reflects a recurring covenant renewal ceremony used later among the people of Israel. They were repeatedly asked: Whom shall you serve?

Our second reading does not ask a question so much as place the Ephesians in the nexus of a Pauline command: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.

How many women silently groaned when you heard “subordinate”? Or in another translation, “submissive”? Let it go.

And you men, how many of you secretly just said “Yes!” Let it go.

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The mutual subordination of which Paul speaks is to be founded upon the cornerstone of Christ’s love for his people. Those in

marriage are to love each other – deciding each day for a covenant renewal, to come together and place the interest of the other first, while working to make their “oneness” grow.

This, Paul says, is a reflection of Christ’s love for the Church, the people of God. That people is to subordinate their lives to the mission and ministry of the covenant they have in Christ and with Christ.

Finally, John’s gospel today brings to an end its six week proclamation. After all that has been said and argued, Jesus asks for a decision from those who have heard his “hard truth”.

Many walked away, repelled and confused, abandoning the “master teacher”. They physically, mentally and, perhaps spiritually, walked away.

Peter and the disciples are then asked the question: Will you leave me, too. As is typical, Peter is the first to respond: “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.”

The decision is clear here in Chapter Six. But it will be tested, as all decisions with full life implications are.

We know of the next chapters – more signs, revealing discourses by Jesus to encourage and support the disciples’ decision, the fleeing and denial, the glory of the Cross, and Peter’s ultimate three reconciliatory responses of love for the Risen One – thus renewing his decision, solidifying it.

Brothers and sisters, “not to decide is to decide”. However, when a life-altering, life-dealing, life-focusing decision is made, it is not a “once and done”, is it?

It’s easy to make decisions and then take them for granted, put them on a back burner while we pay attention to more immediate things. It’s easy to lose sight of what we are doing as we go about doing it! That is especially true of our covenant in Christ. We say “I’m a Christian!” But what are we doing about it as we go about our daily lives?

We, like our ancestors in faith, need to renew and enliven our major life and sacramental decisions.

It’s not so much that we want to reconsider the commitments we have made with an eye to changing them or re-orienting them.

It's a matter of bringing our decisions back to their original intensity so that they can exercise a deeper and more explicitly influence on all subsequent smaller decisions that are a part of our ordinary lives.

Each celebration of Eucharist celebrates decision:

- The decision of God son to become incarnate.
- The decision by Jesus to give his life for our salvation.

Each celebration of Eucharist calls us to decision.

- To associate ourselves with Christ's gift of himself
- To renew our basic decision of faith
- To focus all our major life and sacramental moments in our commitment to Christ's covenant.

We do this over and over to recover the original intensity of faith, to be more intentional in our responses to God's many gifts we have received.

We decide whom we will serve and how; remembering that "not to decide in Christ is to decide".

