

In 1979 Bob Dylan wrote a memorable gospel song called, “Gotta serve somebody:” “but you’re gonna to serve somebody, yes indeed / You’re gonna have to serve somebody / Well it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord / But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

As the song suggests what is at stake, the bottom line is a choice between two masters. Dylan’s lyric is entirely within the realm of the gospel when Jesus says that we “cannot serve two masters.”

Ignatius of Loyola in his spiritual exercises advises during the 2nd week of meditation on “two masters.” One of them Christ the Light, and the other Lucifer, the bearer of false light. Making a choice becomes an act of discernment, the ability to be prudent when it comes to how we will live our lives as disciples of the Lord.

Each of the readings today confronts us with discernment or process of discovery that will take us to a degree between slavery and freedom. The 1st reading speaks of young Elisha must leave his juvenile world of parents and homeland to follow his new master and teacher Elijah.

Paul famously takes up the question of freedom in our 2nd reading. We might say that Paul has maximized the importance of freedom as the very core of our choices to live as a disciple of the Lord. He says, **“For freedom Christ set us free, so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.”**

The gospel today begins, **“When the days for Jesus’ being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.”** Keep the sentence in mind. It’s going to be very important.

On the way the Samaritans refused hospitality to him and the disciples. James and John wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy Samaritans. Talk about a bad selling technique! “Let’s put the fear of God into those Samaritans if they won’t buy our product.” Yet Jesus barely registered the insult. In fact, he rebuked his disciples and kept heading toward Jerusalem.

Then a man comes and says, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus turns him away saying, “You see, I don’t even have a place to lay my head. You decide.” This is a strange sales technique. Jesus got a willing recruit, and he is turning him away.

Then Jesus himself says to one, “Follow me.” But the guy says, Lord, I will come and follow you after my father’s burial. Another responds to Jesus’ offer by saying, “Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

It looks like Jesus is missing a lot of opportunities to sell people on following him. He is not listing the benefits of following him. Is Jesus the worst salesman ever?

Think there is something going on here. Let us look at the sentence that opens the gospel today. Remember I said it would be important? **“When the days for Jesus’ being taken up were fulfilled,**

he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” Jesus knows what’s waiting for him in Jerusalem: Arrest, torture, a loneliness, painful, humiliating death. And yet the Bible says Jesus “resolutely set out to Jerusalem.” He didn’t protest, procrastinate, or try to protect himself. He headed straight toward the cross, knowing that he was fulfilling God’s purpose by giving his life as a sacrifice on our behalf.

When Steve Jobs, the later founder of Apple, was 17 years old. He read a quote that changed his life. **“If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you most certainly be right.”** He says that after that, he began every morning by looking in the mirror and asking himself the question, **“If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?”**

In a 2005 speech Jobs said, *“Remembering that I will be dead soon is the most important tool I have ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose.”*

We would add to Steve’s Jobs’ words that **“Remembering that you are going to die is the best way possible to focus your mind on what is truly important: Is there a God? If so, what does that mean for your life?”**

“Follow me.” Jesus means to invite people to join the path he was taking. He challenges people to join his path. He wants them to count the cost.

How do people know that you are a follower of Christ? Is it because you are attending the church? Maybe! you are studying the Bible? Or you pray before and after meals, or you don’t curse, or drink? Is that what it means to follow Jesus? Or does Jesus’ path requires “a level of commitment, courage and sacrifice” that goes beyond just trying to be a better version of him? I hope today’s gospel story will help you understand that Jesus path is not easy, but it is a pathway to life, joy and Hope and it has meaning. And that God made us for this very purpose.

Jesus considered our life more valuable as His. That’s why he headed to Jerusalem. He was giving up his life as a sacrifice, an offering to God, in our place. In his death he took on the weight and the penalty of our sins so that nothing would stand between us and a holy, holy, holy God.

The secret of the spread of Christianity across the world was because the followers of Christ “Out-loved, out-gave, and out-died the followers of the other religions and cults. They had a great example. Jesus did it first. His love for us motivated Christ to walk the path of commitment, courage and sacrifice for us. And he invites us to follow him, no matter what the cost. I hope you make a choice to follow Christ and find life, joy and meaning for life.