

May 13, 2018 Divine Assistance Homily: The late Bishop Fulton J. Sheen often spoke in admiration of a Swiss psychiatrist and author, Dr. Paul Tournier. Tournier, a serious minded Christian and member of one of the Protestant Reformed churches, was acutely aware of his own shortcomings as a man and he wisely recognized that medical science had not all the answers to life's most difficult questions. So, whenever he was faced with a vexing case, he would suggest to his patient that they pray together. Soon afterward, the two would fall to their knees and appeal for God's assistance. Dr.Tournier may have recalled the words of Christ, "Apart from me, you can do nothing". (Jn.15:60)

In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the spokesman for the 120 disciples gathered together, St. Peter, calls upon his brethren to assist him in making a decision of monumental importance. "The one who was numbered among the twelve and who was allotted a share in Christ's ministry", Judas Iscariot, must be replaced, Judas "handed over" Our Lord to his enemies and hence forfeited his standing as one of the twelve apostles. The time frame is the period between the Ascension of Christ and the Pentecost event, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The one chosen must have followed Jesus from the beginning of his public life until his death because, as St. Peter says, "he must become with us a witness to his resurrection". (Acts 1:22) Two men were considered suitable candidates, Matthias and Justus. Matthias, the patron saint of late vocations, was the one chosen to replace the traitor. (Acts 1:26)

Such a grave decision could not be made without first consulting the Lord and praying for divine assistance. "You Lord, who knows the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen to take the place in the apostolic ministry in which Judas turned away to go to his own place". (Acts 1:24) Lots were then cast. Biblically, it was the way of handing over a decision of enormous importance to God. Casting lots was a method of seeking God's will. There was no casting of votes. Dr. William Barclay, a scripture scholar, puts the casing of lots into sharp focus. "The names of the candidates were written on stones; the stones were put into a vessel and the vessel was shaken until one stone came out; and he whose name was on that stone was elected to office".

In preparing to make a major decision, do we call upon Our Lord for help? Do we seek his guidance? Before rendering a judgment, does a judge pray for the wisdom to make the correct decision? Does a bride call upon the Lord to validate her choice of a husband? Does an employer pray for help in making his choice of a new employee?

The fine example of Christ is very instructive. In St. Luke's gospel, we often find Jesus at prayer. In chapter six, we read the following, "It was at this time that he (Jesus) went out to the mountainside to pray and spent the whole night offering prayer to God. And when day dawned, he called his disciples to him, choosing out twelve of them. These he called apostles". (Lk.6:12-13)

St. Luke also reminds his Christian readers that they are called to be witnesses of the risen Christ. To be an effective witness, we must love one another. And recognize in each person we encounter the presence of Christ Himself.

In closing, let us be mindful that we are God's chosen ones and members of the body of Christ. We enjoy an eminence that requires us to be effective witnesses of the faith we profess daily.

Amen!