

OCTOBER 15, 2023: 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



Growing up, my siblings and I had clothes that were *specifically* for school, play, and church. My mom believed that you should dress appropriately for the activities you were involved in. In the first grade I went to public school, but my mom would not allow me to wear jeans to school. Jeans were the clothes you played in or did your chores in. She believed that how you dressed impacted what you were doing. One day my teacher, Mrs. Wheeler, told us that the next day we needed to wear jeans because of an art project we would be working on. The next morning I dressed in jeans and then left my room to have breakfast. When my mom saw how I was dressed, she immediately told me to go back to my room and put on my school clothes. I re-

turned to my room and found myself in a quandary. My mom told me to do one thing and my teacher gave me different directions. I really was not sure what to do; I believed in doing what I was told. I then got what I considered a brilliant idea. I was very skinny as a child, and so I decided to simply put on my school clothes over the jeans. In that way I could do what both of them told me to do. I came out of my room and my mom was satisfied. When I got to school, I took off my school clothes and my teacher was satisfied. But Mrs. Wheeler did notice what I did and asked me for an explanation. I told her my story and she just smiled at me. She did call my mom to let her know what I did. I assume my mom had a good laugh, and then came to talk to me about my brilliant plan. She told me that in the future, if the teacher gave me instructions like that, to just let her know.

How often it happens in life that we are put in a situation where contradictory choices are placed before us and we are not certain what to do. This can even happen as we try to faithfully live out our life in Christ. Two choices are placed before us and it is not clear what God wants us to do. Both choices are clearly in line with Church teaching. Both choices would seem to bring about positive results. Both choices have attractive reasons for acting on them, but both will have some negative consequences which are just part of doing the right thing. It is so easy in situations like this to feel stuck. We want to make sure we are doing what God desires of us, and yet *both* choices appear to be how He would expect us to act.

I have encountered this dilemma in my life both personally and pastorally as people have asked for my advice. I must admit that some situations are not easy to navigate, and the last thing we want to do is disappoint God. But the reality is that people are inclined to do nothing so as not to offend God. However, God has taught us in the Gospels that simply burying our talent is not an option. God intends for us to act and not remain on the sidelines, afraid of what might happen if we make the wrong choice.

My advice to people and what I personally do in my own life in these situations is to pray a lot about it. I rely on the scriptures and spending time before the Blessed Sacrament. And at times I kind of back-burner the prayer. What I mean by this is that I talk to the Lord about it and then try not to think about it for a couple of days. It just kind of sits there and pops up naturally on its own. But even doing all of this does not always help in getting an answer. And so the struggle continues: what choice do I make? How can I be sure that I am not going to offend God if I take no action? What does He want or need of me to further his plan of salvation, either in my own life or someone else's life?

I do believe that if we are genuine in our struggle and God's intentions are still not clear to us, sometimes we simply need to punt. We simply need to pick one of the two choices. I do not think God is going to get angry with us at this point. We have sincerely sought his will, but for some reason what He wants is not obvious to us. We have taken the time to pray and we have explored the possible scenarios of either choice and still see no clearcut answer to what God is asking of us.

The important thing in times like this is *not* actually our choice but our attitude. We want to follow God's will but we are simply confused as to where He is leading us. However, if we do end up making the wrong choice, it is clear to me that God will still make it work: I believe that after all our struggles, we will be open to changing our direction when God makes it clear to us what He wants. As long as we are willing to pivot, no matter how difficult, we are still good with God.

God does not ask us to make every choice perfectly, only that we do it with a sincere and genuine desire to follow his will. May we seek *only* to follow God's will in our life to the best of our ability.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call me at (978) 254-0560. If you prefer to email, please visit <https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "Fr." and "Brian" connected.

Fr. Brian