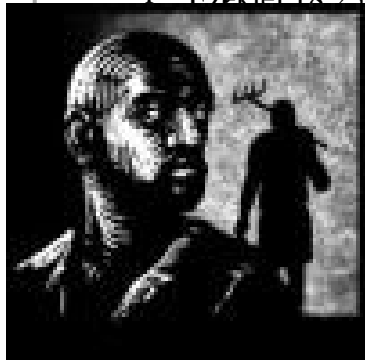


Sustaining a lifelong yes to God

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Sep. 23, 2011

When a man and a woman who love each other wish to commit themselves to one another for life, they celebrate that love and their life together with the exchanging of vows and the declaration, "I do!" In order for their love to grow and their marital commitment to deepen, every day of their lives together must also be affirmed and reaffirmed by an endless catena of "I dos." At times this declaration will trip happily off their tongues; at other times, it will require strength, courage and perseverance to continue to say and to mean "I do!" In truth, there are also times when one partner or the other (or both) becomes wearied by the effort required to sustain a good relationship; some may even decide to say, "I don't?" or "I won't?" or "I can't." It is at these times when the human prerogative to change one's mind and heart is most challenged. Today, the sacred texts and their authors invite our serious consideration of this prerogative.

Ezekiel, in the first reading, was reasoning with his contemporaries in exile who regarded their situation as unfair punishment. But rather than allow them to find fault with God or to cast blame on another, the prophet urged them to say yes to God in all circumstances, so that they might bear with any and every circumstance. He urged them to say yes to God by Sunday in Ordinary Time, find the hope they needed to await their deliverance.



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Paul, in his letter to his beloved Philippians, encouraged them to find the strength to

say yes and/or "I do!" to God in the example of Jesus who emptied himself to illustrate God's incredible love for sinners. Paul also assured his readers that they would be supported in their good efforts by the love, compassion and mercy they shared with one another in Jesus' name.

In today's Gospel, the Matthean Jesus addresses the perennial fickleness of the human heart that often reacts impulsively rather than thoughtfully to God's challenges. An initial no can become a yes if grace is allowed to enlighten human reason; a quick, unreasoned yes can become a no as it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain a lifelong commitment of faith in God and in service to others. Nevertheless, those who exercise their prerogative to change their no to a yes, or an "I won't?" to an "I do," will experience a God who rejoices in their decision rather than reproaches their past indecision or poor choices. Would that those strong enough to change their noes to yeses might also know the joy of being supported and encouraged by their brothers and sisters in the faith.

As believers in a community of faith, we are aware that our first "I do?" or yes came at baptism, whether spoken

of our own volition or that of our godparents. This initial yes introduced a series of responses to God's graced calls; these punctuated our lives with opportunities to love, to worship, to serve, to grow and to witness to the good news of salvation. During every sacramental encounter and with every fervent prayer, our yes to God is made stronger, firmer. At our weekly liturgical celebrations our yes is enlightened by the Word that is proclaimed and nourished by the bread that is shared. Certainly, it is right and fitting that our Sundays are yes days. But the continuing challenge for believers lies in translating Sunday fervor into a daily and deliberate habit of agreeing with and acquiescing to God in all things. In other words, we are not part-time or weekend disciples; rather, we who belong to God and depend on God for every breath we take are to acknowledge our belonging and use that breath to say, "Yes! I do!" to God.

Obviously, the habit of saying yes to God requires lifelong care and constant attention. Indeed, says Yves de Montcheuil (*Le Royaume et ses exigences*, EPI, 1957) we may not sit back and relax. We have to be always following Jesus without knowing beforehand where we are going, ready to discern and say yes to what God is expecting of us. God's demands upon us are an impetus to grow. Moreover, God may ask of us tomorrow something more and something different than is asked today, so we are constantly engaged in ever changing and ever new ways to say yes. But this should not generate agitation or instability for we are always assured that God inspires our every yes with grace and blesses our every yes with love.

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