

# Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

## CROSSING WITH LIFE: A LIVELY CHOICE

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Analysis by Michael Hoy

15See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. 16If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. 17But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, 18I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Death and Adversity

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Serving Other Gods*

Maybe it wouldn't even occur to the people of Israel that they would serve other gods while making their way into the new land,

though there was already early evidence of that false worship in the wilderness. And it was certainly a part of their history of the people with which the Deuteronomist was familiar (29:22-29). All of this comes with disobedience to God, the breaking of God's commandments. It would also be known just how much this infidelity would spill out in other ways—neglecting the widows, the orphans, and the aliens in their midst; a whole host of evils that would bring regret and deep sorrow to later generations (including our own). But these sins are not simply to be scapegoated on these parents; they are our sins as well. What gods are we serving? Money? Pride? Fear? Distraction from boredom?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Hearts Turned Away***

This panoply of false deities is not simply all around us, calling us to lives and actions that are contrary to God's will, but within us—in our hearts, which are now turned away from the living God, on a path to perishing. And what is more, we may be blind to all of this, fooling ourselves to think that our hearts are firmly committed to the "LORD your God," when in fact they are not. (The gospel for today will up that ante sufficiently to make us aware of how much that deception has been going on; cf. Matthew 5:21-37). There is no trust, only the dis-ease that our false worship has brought us.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Cursed***

The curse runs deep (see how deeply it is detailed in Deuteronomy 28:15-68). And so does the judgment: "I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess." All our journeys are getting us nowhere, no place, and with no hope.

## PROGNOSIS: Life and Prosperity

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Blessed +*

In the passage just prior to this reading, the blessing of God's promise is lifted up with these words: "Surely this commandment I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea [or "the deep"], and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." (30:11-14). St. Paul could not resist recalling this passage to the memory of his own dear people, saddened and beleaguered by the curse, with Christ as the one who descended from heaven to bring us the promise, and was raised from the depths of death and adversity for our salvation (Romans 10:5-8). The Word is near us in Jesus the Christ, himself taking the curse into death on the cross, so that we may have from him instead his blessing. One cannot expect the Deuteronomist to add the cross to the meaning of blessing. But for us today, we get to add it, for we see the One who has come to make that blessing lasting and whole.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Holding Fast to Him*

How wonderfully and powerfully, therefore, the Deuteronomist calls us to a hearts "holding fast to him" as our salvation. For the first obedience is the obedience to Christ, faith, trusting that it is Christ himself who is obedient unto death for us. We claim—choose if you will—the One who chose us. We trust God's presence in Jesus Christ as Lord with our hearts, and find again the saving promise of the God who is there to bless our lives with hope. Leave the false gods behind. Drop them from your hands and hearts. Grasp, choose, the life of the God who has

been with us on the journey all along, and will see us beyond all our crossings!

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Walking in His Ways***

The journey, then, is the journey of faith. For the people of Israel, it was crossing into a new land; and the journey would take them also into exile and back; but always the presence of God was there along the path, ultimately to heal and restore. For us, too, it is crossing into new lands and territories, crossing the lives we encounter with promise and hope that there is indeed a God who loves us, blesses us, and gives us the courage to take new steps—even seeing those steps as not merely our own, but “in his ways.”