

A few weeks ago when I showed up at work, I noticed a car in the service parking lot covered in mud. One wheel was pointing in one direction. Another was pointing in the exact opposite direction. The car was a total mess. I was curious as to how the car got into such a shape so I went inside and asked one of our service advisors. Apparently, the owner of the car was from up North and was traveling through the area when she found herself stuck in a field. She told the tow truck driver that her GPS instructed her to turn right so she did, even though there was no road there. It's amazing to me how much trust people put in the GPS in their car to get them to their destination.

Instead of a Global Positioning System, our readings today provide us with a heavenly GPS to use. We are reminded of the magnificent wisdom of God's Plan for Salvation. If we follow this GPS, it will bring us to our ultimate destination in Heaven; which is a state of happiness so complete and overflowing that no eye has ever seen something so beautiful, no ear has ever heard something so pleasing, nor has anyone ever been able to imagine something so perfect.

Jesus' death and resurrection make this destination a real possibility for us. It's not some unobtainable goal. It's very much within our reach because our life, from here to eternity, is built on our choices. We were created as free beings with the ability to choose between good and evil, between life and death. In our first reading, Sirach teaches us that we can choose to follow our heavenly GPS or not. The decision is ours. God's Commandments is the route we should take. They reflect God's wisdom, and that not only makes them good choices, but the best choices, even if sometimes in the face of uncertainty we have to trust in God in making His choices our choices.

In our second reading, Saint Paul tells us that our choices shouldn't be made just out of obligation, but out of love. They have to be choices made from the heart or they'll never achieve their full potential. The world we live in has a wisdom to it, but its surface has to be scratched to realize how superficial that wisdom can be. Sometimes scratching below the surface reveals what we thought to be wisdom to actually be folly.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us that all the commandments have a purpose and reflect a wisdom that can shape our lives for the better if we choose to observe them from the heart. In His discourse, He calls out those who observe the commandments only for outward show and without the proper interior disposition. God doesn't do anything pointless; everything is part of His loving plan for us. He didn't come to simply discard the old covenant, the "law and the prophets," as never having had any purpose at all. Rather, He put the old covenant's purpose into context. In His own words, He did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.

A common recurring defense today for a watered-down life ethic is, "hey, at least I'm not killing anybody." Jesus reminds us that not killing anybody is good, but we're called to more. We're called to go deeper. We have to go way beyond living for outward show. When we can honestly say, "hey, at least I don't hate anybody," we're getting closer to the mark. We're getting closer to the proper interior disposition.

In a violent world, maybe sometimes we look the other way in the face of a lack of kindness, but Jesus calls us to go the distance and actually be kind to everybody. When tempers flare and rash words are said the best thing to do is to try to make amends as soon as possible and simply apologize. If we live a life of cruel and cold justice, focusing especially on the justice due to us, we'll be in for a surprise when Jesus judges us by the same harsh standards to which we

held others. As we will recite in Our Lord's prayer in a few minutes, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

A few years ago, business expert Stephen Covey published a book called *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In the book, he identified certain behavior patterns that were shared by people who succeed in the world. The book was an incredible hit - it sold over 15 million copies. One reason it was so successful was because the principles he identified and described are all in harmony with human nature, with common sense. The second "habit" he discusses in the book is this: successful people "begin with the end in mind."

It seems so simple. We do this all the time. When we start driving the car, we make our first turn based on our final destination. When we choose a career, we base our choice on a projected outcome - a goal we want to achieve. But what about life itself? How often do we think about the end, the goal of our whole lives? Unfortunately, we all too often forget about to where we are journeying. We forget about our destination, so we wander aimlessly towards death.

Every day is a new beginning, a new step towards our eternal home. But if we don't consciously renew our choice of what that destination is - Heaven - we may easily be distracted, or even deceived, into making wrong turns and heading down dead-end roads. It's like the successful businessman who once said: "I spent my life climbing the ladder of success, only to discover that it was leaning against the wrong wall."

Jesus wants us to begin each day with the end - Heaven - in mind, so that each day we're able to make choices that will lead to true, lasting happiness, which only comes from living and dying in friendship with Him.

Brothers and sisters, God wants us to be happy and to be with Him for all eternity, so He warns us about everything that could damage or destroy that friendship, leading eventually to eternity spent without Him. That's an indescribably painful notion, because we were created to live in union with God. Eternity without Him is everlasting darkness. Since Jesus loves us, He tells us the truth – even the tough truth that is unsettling to hear. Hell is very real. Now, He won't send us there but we have the free will to choose to go there. God loves us so much that He gives us what we truly want. C.S. Lewis put it this way, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those who say to God, 'My will be done.'"

The proper route has been laid out for us by the teaching and example of Jesus' life. He has shown us the way and has given us the directions as to how to get to Him in Heaven. All we have to do is put our trust in God's Plan for Salvation and follow His heavenly GPS. Sure there will be times when we get off track and make bad decisions. Sometimes, we may think we know better and map out our own course; which leads us to finding ourselves in the spiritual version of being lost or even muddy in a field. When this happens, will you let God recalculate your route?