

A time for decisions

We live in a world of multiple choices. Even deciding which washing powder to buy can be a taxing business, not to mention the moral dilemmas we face when deciding what we are going to eat and drink. Whereas in the not too distant past, the majority of people could be expected to spend all their working lives in the same job, today it is normal for people to make career changes every few years. There are even consultants who specialise in this field and mentor people through the process. There are surely upsides as well as downsides to this.

When our choices were limited or effectively made for us we may never have been able to fulfil our potential or discover latent talents. By the same token we were likely to have put our energy into ensuring that we made the best of our situations and we probably learnt to be grateful for what we had.

By contrast, today, with all the new opportunities, we may be able to discover those latent talents and make our dreams come true. However, when we are constantly having to make decisions, we also run the risk of never being satisfied; never confident that we have made the right decisions or are in the right job; always looking over our shoulders or across the wall at grass which seems so much greener than ours.

The call of Matthew in the Gospel provides us with a good meditation on decision-making.

Allowing for the fact that there is usually much that is unsaid in the gospel stories, Matthew's immediate response to the invitation from Jesus to follow him is remarkable. Are we to conclude that without a moment's thought he left his job and the security it afforded and followed? Was there no discernment process? If he did not have a career-change consultant to advise him, did he not at least talk things over with his few friends? (I say "few" because, as a tax-collector, he probably didn't have many.)

We can only surmise, but it is not unreasonable to assume that he may have seen if not met Jesus before. It is likely that he would have been aware of Jesus' reputation, particularly his willingness to associate and even dine with those who were regarded as social outcasts. It is possible then that Matthew was just waiting for the invitation, for the chance to escape from a job that left him on the fringes of society and compromised his moral integrity.

In our own lives there will be occasions when we will need time to think through and consult before we can discern what the right course of action is; there will be others when we know instinctively or immediately what to do and all we need is the courage to act.

The phrase in Hosea – "I want love, not sacrifice" – is quoted by Jesus because he was frustrated by the duplicity of the Pharisees, whose concern for liturgical exactness was not matched by the conduct of their lives. Personal integrity is a good yardstick whenever we are concerned with deciding a right course of action.