

**CHOOSING HOW YOU SPEND IT**  
**Sermon for St. Lawrence Day**  
LPC, 8/9/15

A million years ago, when I was about six months pregnant with my first child, something took place that suggested to me that I hadn't made such a bad choice in selecting a husband. Rich and I were on the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, which connects Delaware with southern New Jersey. This was when we lived in Charlottesville, VA, and often vacationed at the Jersey shore. We'd taken the ferry many times and never had any trouble. Until...

When we boarded this one time, the last passengers aboard arrived with much noise. These were two enormous men on Harley-Davidson motorcycles. They were stereotypical bikers: each about six-and-a-half feet tall, about 250, 275, tattooed up and down their densely muscled arms, upholstered in black leather and metal studs. They were very impressive.

On this particular crossing, the seas were really high, and the captain announced that all passengers needed to clear the decks, come inside the main cabin, and take seats. I have always been a pretty good sailor, but as I say, I was pregnant, and sitting down seemed like a good idea. The last to come inside were the bikers, swaggering and grudging. They clearly weren't afraid of a few rough waves.

They sat down right in front of us.

No sooner had they done this when they lit up cigarettes, in defiance of the prominent "No Smoking" signs. Well. I was pregnant. The ship was rolling like a seesaw, and the smoke was the last straw. I began to feel like I was going to throw up. "Let's move," I whispered to Rich, wondering how I was going to negotiate the pitching deck. "No," said Rich, and politely tapped on the burly shoulder of one of these giants saying, "Excuse me, there's no smoking."

The guy stood up, turned around and flexed menacingly. (I hate it when men do this. Take it from me, the God person, that if God has blessed you with a big strong body God does not intend that you use it to intimidate people.) Rich stood up to meet the man's gaze. He was about a foot shorter, and took up approximately one-third the real estate.

"Who's gonna make me stop?" the biker snarled.

I thought, "Here I am, six months pregnant, and I'm going to be a widow."

Rich replied calmly, "My wife is pregnant and sensitive to smoke. If you won't stop smoking on my say-so, I'll get one of the ship's officers."

There I was, cowering as well as my large belly would allow, but the guy just looked at me contemptuously, threw his cigarette on the deck, stamped it out with his steel-toed boot and sat back down.

What awed me is that Rich wasn't in the least intimidated. I asked him where he got the courage and he said he didn't think about it. His love for me and for our baby was his total motivation, his only concern at that moment.

When I think about the heroic actions of the great martyrs, like St. Lawrence of Rome, I think something of the same dynamic must have been operative. Imagine St. Lawrence the deacon in front of the Roman prefect who had ordered the execution of his boss and six coworkers. Lawrence had been spared only because of his temporary value to the Roman Empire. He knew where the church's treasure was hidden. Legend has it that when released to retrieve the treasure, Lawrence not only retrieved it, but liquidated it and distributed the proceeds to the poor of Rome. When he reappeared as commanded before the prefect Lawrence gestured to a group of poor people and declared, "Here is the treasure of the church!"

What gave Lawrence the courage to so brazenly defy the forces that could and would kill him? If my theory is correct, the answer is love. So great was Lawrence's love for Jesus Christ that, like Rich in coming to my defense in love, Lawrence may not even have given his defense of the church a second thought.

I can't help wondering if my love for Jesus would be that great... if any of us have love that strong, so as to stand up for Christ against a bully, without thinking, only loving. God willing, we'll never have to find out.

There is something else about Lawrence though. He had to do *some* thinking. The church was in danger of being wiped out. Lawrence had access to this wealth that was supposed to sustain an organization whose leadership was dead and whose survival was unlikely. There was probably time to do only one thing with the treasure. What would you have done?

I dare say some of us might have taken the money and run, probably justifying this action by convincing ourselves we were saving the money against the possibility of the church's resurgence. But that's not what Lawrence did. Lawrence was faced with deciding what might well be the church's last official act, and he decided to feed the poor. Isn't that interesting?

If you were given the responsibility of performing what might well be the last official act of the church, what would you choose to do? I think this may well be the most remarkable thing about Lawrence, not his bravery in facing martyrdom. Given the choice of disposing of the last of the church's resources, Lawrence chose charity. Lawrence chose love.

Lawrence had been given responsibility for a treasure, and he chose to spend it on love. Those bikers had been given big strong bodies and chose to spend them in intimidation. Rich was given physical courage, and chose to spend it defending his family against bullies.

The Son of God was given a human body, and he chose to spend it on love.

What have you been given? And how will you spend it?