

Thirteenth Sunday of the year July 02, 2017

2 Kings 4, 8-11 14-16; Romans 6, 3-4 8-11; Matthew 10 37-42

God invites every person to be close to him, to trust him and love him. From the beginning God called human persons to be with him for he is the creator for he has made every human person in his own image and likeness and desires to have constant contact with him. He invites everyone to a close personal relationship with him and when they do wrong and go astray; he invites them to a spirit of repentance to make them live a life worthy of him. He wants everyone to observe his commands and be close to him in obedience and self-sacrifice. God speaks to us in many ways, particularly through the word of God. The Sunday scriptural readings provide useful background. This leads us to better understand the word of God and link it with our daily activities of life in a meaningful way. In the Gospel of today Jesus invites his disciples to a great sacrifice even death itself for Christ. He adds that it is necessary to give and share what we have with others. Every giving in the name of Jesus involves a sacrifice and a reward. The first reading too gives us the very same theme of giving in the name of God and there will be God becoming beneficial to the person. In the second reading Paul invites us to be buried in Christ through Baptism in order to receive new life. In and through our Baptism we die to sin and enter into new life with God.

All of today's readings remind us that we become fully alive through the generous giving of ourselves. That does not mean only giving a lot of money or things to others or placing importance to worthy causes. It is more important to give ourselves to people: in the way we speak about them, in the way we forgive their failings, in the way we encourage them, in the way we show hospitality towards them and even in the way we think about them. These types of generosity reflect warmth radiating from the very love of God. However the generosity we exhibit should be here now and not at the last moment. We all know the story of the cow and the pig and how the pig complained that now one shows gratitude but the cow is ever praised by all. The cow pondered and responded that it is because the cows give while they are still alive. In this way our generosity should be here and now coming from the depth of our hearts and totally committed. It is like what Jesus says that our left hand must not know what the right hand is doing. But Jesus promises us that the smallest services done to others will not go unrewarded.

In the first reading the wealthy and pious woman did nothing remarkable in offering hospitality to Prophet Elisha when he occasionally passed that way. A piece of floor space, a mat, some food and friendship she offered and later asked her husband to build a little hut for the prophet on the roof of the house. In Biblical times hospitality was considered an important virtue. This was especially true when extended to someone doing God's work. The reverence was extended to the office and not necessarily to the person. The woman's kindness in making special arrangement to the Prophet was in reality kindness to God. The prophet felt the need of rewarding her for her generosity she now receives a reward beyond all proportions. She was longing to have a son and in the name of God, the prophet promises the reward she wishes to have. This is because Yahweh the God of Elisha is certain to reward to those who are charitable to his servant. It was just a minor incident in the life of the prophet, who worked greater miracles but it is narrated here to show how God rewards those who are charitable to his friends. The woman recognized Elisha as the man of God. She was a believer in God and wanted to show her love for the divine by helping those who preached his name. This incidence is indeed more than a lesson to us at time when God and his presence are sidelined. Our service may be rendered to those in need and bring in them the peace which is divine.

The foundation of Jesus' request for commitment is recalled in today's section of St Paul's letter to the Romans. Christians in a world of sin must live out their Baptism. In Paul's time Baptism was by immersion. This symbolized dying to sin so as to rise and live a new life that Christ intended: a life of liberation from the power of sin and death. This involves incorporation into Christ and into his Body, the church. Thus a new creation takes place whereby we begin a lifelong process of dying to sin and becoming alive for God with the new life of the Gospel. Understanding the idea of Baptism in Peter's letter we are also being anointed with oil making us part of the Royal Priesthood of Christ. Therefore we have to be true to Christ's calling in Baptism to die to sin and to be born again in Christ. Further being clothed with the white garment and holding the lighted candle symbolizes that we have put on Christ and the light of faith must burn continuously in our life.

Today's Gospel is the conclusion of the instructions and consolations that we have heard Jesus offering to his disciples during the past few weeks. In this passage, Jesus summarizes both the costs of discipleship and its rewards. A disciple is one

who knows his master well, has fully understood his life and now puts it into practice. This disciple gives his whole hearted submission and puts into practice the word of his master. Here again our understanding of the Gospel is strengthened by considering the context in which it was written and the perspective of Matthew's audience. The conditions of discipleship outlined in Matthew's Gospel may appear harsh. Yet they underline for us a truth—choosing anything with one's whole heart has consequences. Choosing life with Christ means that every relationship we have must be understood from a new perspective. For many in Matthew's community, this choice brought division to their family.

In the first part of today's Gospel Jesus tells his representatives, his delegates the Apostles and those who succeed them that they must be prepared to undergo great sacrifices and even be ready to die if they are called on to doing so for Christ. Even though they had very vague idea then of what Jesus meant, when the time came they remembered his words and gladly suffered imprisonment, hardships and finally martyrdom for Christ. This show how the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit transformed them from worldly weak persons into fearless heroes who were ready give themselves wholly for him. They had become convinced that Jesus was the Son of God who had come into the world to bring all people to their heavenly reward. They realized how this earthly life is so transitory and unimportant in comparison with the eternal life to come. So they deliberately chose greater life and by their life example are called upon to show the greatness of their choice. In the second part we have the same theme as in the first reading of today namely the Lady of Shunem was rewarded by God for her charitable deed. Jesus promises similar reward but with a difference. It will be greater reward in the world to come.

In the Gospel of today we admire the total honesty of Jesus as he speaks to his disciples. He speaks paradoxically of being alive as involving such a degree of generous commitment to him as to be willing to let go of even those things we hold dearest in our life: our reputation, our physical well-being, and even our family ties if necessary. Sometimes one has to choose between one's closest ties on this earth and loyalty to Jesus. Those who would try to compromise as a way of keeping peace soon discover that keeping peace is not the same as having peace. Expressing his honesty Jesus tells us that whoever does not take up his cross and follow after him is not worthy of him. The people of Galilee to whom

Jesus was speaking knew very well what a cross was. When the Roman General Varus had crushed a revolt in Galilee, he had two thousand Jews crucified there and had the crosses placed by the road sides as a lesson to others. People had often witnessed the condemned man carrying the cross and walking down the street as a punishment. This would later apply to Jesus himself.

We may ask the question what it means to be alive and what kind of life we obtain by carrying the cross. Jesus tells us that it is the only kind of life worth living. People who seek only themselves bring themselves to ruin. On the other hand those who bring themselves to nothing for the sake of Jesus and give themselves to others discover who they are. And that is what life is all about: discovering the truth of who we are. This is one of the highest values. Jesus is very clear that we cannot hoard life or we will lose what makes life valuable and make ourselves and others unhappy. Only when we spend life gloriously for God and for others we will find life here in this world and also in the world to come. To live as Jesus wants is to bring to life self-discovery, fruitfulness and spiritedness. Otherwise we merely exist and do not actually live.

Matthew also outlines the reward of hospitality offered to Jesus' followers. In today's Gospel, Jesus explains the difficulties of discipleship, yet reveals that those who welcome the disciples have also welcomed him. Today's Gospel also highlights for us the importance of hospitality in the Christian life. To welcome another in Jesus' name is to extend hospitality to Jesus himself. Jesus will surely reward the person for this generous act. We have many opportunities in our daily life to reach out to others, to be a welcoming presence and a sign of God's love. In the Christian era all those who cooperate even in a little way, will also be rewarded. The reward may not come to them in this life, but if not it will be all the greater; it will be in the next life. Indeed the apostles gave their life gladly for Christ. There are thousands of martyrs too in the early church and later on down the centuries who willingly gave their life for Christ because they were fully convinced of the eternal life waiting for them. The church has witnessed the persecutions of Christians and they have accepted suffering and death for his sake.

To be one with Jesus means to be a follower of Jesus or becoming his disciple. A disciple is one who knows the master well, has shared his life with him, who accepts his word and teachings and assists in spreading the doctrines with

devotion. A Christian disciple is a person who accepts and assists in the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in our hearts, to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christ like. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting to examine their thoughts, words and actions and compare them with the Word of God. Jesus himself says that he is the one who listens to the word of God and keeps it. This requires that we be in the Word daily—studying it, praying over it, and obeying it. In addition, we should always be ready to give testimony of the reason for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15) and to make disciples of others inviting them to walk in his way.

The word disciple or discipleship commonly elicits a mental connotation of the followers of Christ in the Gospels. This connection is fitting because the root of the word disciple comes from the Latin “discipulus,” which means pupil or follower; one who accepts and follows a given doctrine or teacher”. Total union and familiarity with the master is essential. All who are baptized in the name of the Triune God and confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord are Christians and, by definition, disciples. They are the ones who retain word of God in their heart and live it.

Today as we carry the message home, let us remember our Lord's words to us: he who receives or gives hospitality and help to a prophet will have the reward of a prophet. He who helps those who are preaching and teaching the message of salvation, the good news of Christ, at home or abroad, will himself share the reward of these preachers and teachers. We remember the sayings of Jesus at the last judgment that whatever good or bad done to others is similar to that done to Jesus himself. So let us remember the promise of Jesus: even a cup of cold water will not go unrewarded; every little helping hand we give to bring our fellowmen to their eternal reward will help us to reach the same goal. Let us then keep this message in mind to reach out to others and discover the presence of Jesus in them.

A certain woman given much to piety had a dream. She was told that Jesus himself would come to her and she must prepare herself and wait for him. She got up very early, cleaned the house, kept things ready for the guest including a meal and waited for the Lord. As she was standing there with expectation a

beggar woman came asking for food. The woman was annoyed and chased her out saying I am waiting for an important guest and come another day and I will help you. Then her neighbour came to her and asked for some urgent help and she refused saying she was busy as she was waiting for an important guest. Then a school boy came to her asking for some help as he was not able to get the necessary books and she refused. The day went on. Several people turned up at the gate for help or request of some kind or other and Jesus did not come. Sadly she went to sleep that night and she had a dream. In her dream the Lord came again and she began to complain to him telling how he had let her down. Jesus told her, "My friend, I came to you several times and you refused to recognize me. I was the beggar woman who was hungry, I was the neighbour who needed the help, and I was the school boy who needed support. Whatever you do to the little of my brothers you do it to me."

It happened that once a family left their place for a vacation, the entire set up of friends wishing them the farewell. After the parents with their little child left the place there was a storm and the message was received that they were caught in the storm and the car was damaged. After some time there was no message and hence a search party was arranged early in the morning and after nearly twelve hours of search the party found them half buried in snow. It certainly would seem a heroic story of a family. The mother was sitting in the car wearing her own coat and that of her husband to keep herself and the baby warm. But in the cold he was frozen to death. The mother kept huddling that child in that bitter cold and shielding it with her arms and they had become numb without circulation and later had to be amputated. The child was totally secure in the warmth of both its parents smiling as the party found them. That is glory of family sacrifice.

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