

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

REFLECTION 1: WATER IS THICKER THAN BLOOD

Many years ago, I heard a sermon in which the priest made this peculiar, yet intriguing statement: "Water is thicker than blood." He was referring to the question Paul poses in today's second reading from his letter to the Romans: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him through baptism...so that...we might live in newness of life." Similarly, the Gospel of Matthew poses the puzzling and often upsetting assertion: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

To understand these claims, we must consider the time and place in which Jesus was making this claim. Jewish families in Jesus' time were controlled by the unquestionable authority of the father. Everyone in his household lived in total submission to him. Today's sacred writings remind us that Jesus and Paul recognized that this notion of family was too small, too narrow, too restrictive. The larger and far more important reality was the conviction that the waters of baptism can create a new kind of family – a family that is composed of people who have discovered that an entirely different style of living is attainable. This new style they are recommending demonstrates how the waters of baptism can truly be thicker than blood.

The message is clear: Our baptism matters. It changes us. It calls us to re-think our value system, to re-view what truly counts, to re-commit ourselves to what will surely last against all odds. This initiatory sacrament is a marker point. It is an immersion into a life that is out of the ordinary, which introduces us to a lifestyle that is wholeheartedly focused on the reality of God. Since the majority of us were mere infants when this sacred ceremony took place, it is all the more important for us as adults to review and to meditate upon those powerful words that were spoken on our behalf. In doing so, we will be reminded that we were originally 'bathed in light', and given the mission to be 'followers and witnesses to the Gospel'.

With these challenging words, Jesus is trying to teach us two important things in this Gospel passage: First, Jesus is calling us to share his own passion for God. He wants us to light a fire that will burn in our hearts just like it did in his. He is asking us not just to praise him and adore him and worship him, but most importantly of all – to follow him. Do as he did. Love what he loved. Be committed to what he was committed to: selfless service and genuine compassion. Second, Jesus is asking us to join him in creating a new type of family. He wants us to leave behind the kind that was so prominent in his time, and begin forming a family united by the common desire to do God's will.

In a word, Jesus wants us to become baptised *in our hearts*. In doing so, Jesus is asking us to re-imagine the meaning of family, namely a community of people dedicated to witnessing to the world what life could be like if we were willing to be transformed and changed. Admittedly, that will not be easy. It will involve stretching us, pulling us out of our small selves, introducing us to something bigger and richer and fuller. It will involve taking us to a whole new level of living. Even to one where water is thicker than blood.