

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

REFLECTION 1:

THE HONESTY OF JESUS

The shortest Eucharistic prayer in the liturgy is Eucharistic Prayer No. 2. In it we pray 'We celebrate ... giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you'. So, we baptized Christians are collaborators along with Jesus in the work of salvation. It's the invitation we accepted through our parents and godparents at our baptism. As we grew in years, we can decide to accept, postpone, or reject the freedom that God offers.

One aspect that strikes us forcefully in today's Gospel (Luke 9: 51-62) is the utter honesty of Jesus in response to his three would be followers. To the first man his advice was 'Before you follow me, count the cost'. No one can ever claim to have been induced to follow Jesus under false pretences. Jesus pitches his demands high and we should never let people think that being a Christian makes no difference. We ought rather to tell them that it should make all the difference in the world. We might have fewer people in the pews, but those we have would be really pledged to Christ.

Jesus' words to the second man sound harsh, 'let me go and bury my father'. But it need not be so. In all probability the man's father was not dead, his saying most likely meant, 'I will follow you after my father has died'. The story is told of a brilliant young Arab who was offered a scholarship to Trinity College. His answer was, 'I will take it up after I have buried my father'. At the time his father was very much alive in his mid-40s. The point that Jesus was making is that in everything there is a crucial moment and if that moment is missed, the thing most likely will never be done at all. The man in the story had stirrings in his heart to get out of a spiritually dead end and if he missed that moment he would never get out. Jesus urges us to act at once, when our heart is stirred.

Jesus' words to the third man states a truth that no one can deny. No ploughman ever ploughed a straight furrow looking back over his shoulder. There are some of us whose hearts are in the past and think wistfully of the good old days. The Christian advances not to the sunset but to the dawn. The watchword of the kingdom is not 'Backwards' but 'Forward'. To this man Jesus did not say either 'Follow' or 'Return'. Rather he said that he didn't accept lukewarm service and he left the man to make his own decision.

Jesus tells us clearly today through our Gospel reading that there is no room for being wishy-washy. A follower of Jesus will have no place to rest his head. Disciples of his must abandon their former lives and make known the kingdom of God. He tells us that if we look back we're not fit to proclaim the kingdom. Jesus was looking for people who would walk with him, live his teaching, stay the pace and

stand in at Gethsemane and Calvary. Then experience the Resurrection and at last see the point of all that went before. Our challenge may not look so dramatic, but for our little country it is just as important. As is the need to respond

REFLECTION 2:

WANTING TO FOLLOW JESUS

In today's Gospel (Lc. 9: 51-62), people are declaring that they want to follow Jesus and Jesus reminds them of the difficulties of such a vocation. When Pope Francis was discerning his call to priesthood, he felt that the most powerful message of Jesus was 'mercy'. Jesus saw the tax collector Levi (Matthew) through the eyes of mercy and Pope Francis chose his saying 'Follow me'. These words of invitation also spoke to the future Pope who adopted it as the Papal motto, 'Jesus, mercy towards sinners'. Today, the entire church is midway through the Jubilee Year of Mercy and Pope Francis is urging us in the words of Jesus 'Follow me'.

St Paul in his letters to the various churches he founded used strong words when writing about freedom - freedom from anything and everything that might limit one's following of Jesus Christ. In fact, today's readings do nothing at all to promote moderation - for instance we witness the young Elisha (first reading) demonstrating his determination to follow God's calling by slaughtering his family oxen and cooking them over a fire of farm implements and serving a feast for everyone who would come - in all 15,000 litres of stew was on offer for the hungry!

Today's reading from Luke, the Evangelist, announces that 'The time was fulfilled for Jesus to be taken up'. As he began his ascent to Jerusalem, a key question became who would go with him and what that journey would cost?

A Samaritan village turned out to be decidedly unwelcoming, and Jesus had to restrain his disciples' demand for instant punishment and so the group, headed by Jesus passed on. Two would-be disciples came along, one thinking that fellowship with Jesus would be a great adventure, while yet another would defer the offer till he had settled all his domestic affairs. Jesus gave no guarantee of security or comfort, only this mysterious 'overabundant return' promised to those who would leave all else behind to follow him.

The Kingdom of God demands letting go of old ways - looking back, Jesus would say, cultivates a divided heart, a worldly attachment would not be capable of withstanding the rigours of the road.

We must help one another and do what we are capable of doing by encouragement and support. Perhaps a reflection by Stephen Grellet sums up what we are trying to say,

'I shall pass through life but once. Any good therefore I can do, or any kindness I can show, to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again'.

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