

June 30, 2019

1 Ks 19:16b,19-21; Gal 5:1,13-18; Lk 9:51-62

One theme that is popular in stories and movies is of a hidden hero. This is the person who has some special ability, and a special mission to perform in life but doesn't know it. Usually they meet a wise individual who shows them what that destiny is, and guides them to develop their abilities properly and use them towards that mission. Sometimes they misuse these abilities in a moment of anger and have to be corrected by their wise guide, they have to be shown to keep focused on the greater picture of their mission and not on a momentary situation. This is a hard thing for all of us, keeping our eyes on the big picture and not focus too much on momentary hurts and changing situations.

In the Gospel today Jesus gets rejected in a village and some of his disciples react in a normal human way: *Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?* They have seen power to heal, they have seen Jesus perform miracles of many types - now they want to use the power of God to retaliate for their feelings being hurt. The movies get it right when they show the misuse of power like that deforms and eventually destroys the person who uses their ability to satisfy their own anger and desires for revenge. Jesus rebukes them (he tells them to knock it off), then just directs them to move forward and focus on the mission ahead (he just moves on to the next village). If we could have that kind of detachment from the people that wound us we would be a lot happier and would see that there is a greater thing to put our effort in, a greater mission, a more satisfying thing in front of us than allowing ourselves to be twisted and deformed internally by such vengeful thoughts from the past.

But what is that mission, that goal, that purpose? It is not just one thing through our whole life, it keeps changing as we and our situations in life change. What remains the same is that it is a following of Jesus. It is a letting Jesus be the guide who shows us our mission and how we are to use our abilities. Let's look in our readings today and see what the Lord has to show us about this responding to the call and wisdom of God.

In the first reading, Elisha had it pretty easy in one way. Elijah was the wise old prophet, everyone knew him. Elisha's mission was to be the prophet to succeed Elijah. His call was easy - Elijah came to him when he was plowing the fields and basically said "ok, come on, your with me." Wow! For Elisha no deep trying to figure out what the call was - and he lucked out - the

call came complete with a wise old man to teach him what he was supposed to do and what his mission was. His call was radical, he had to leave his life behind. And he does. He doesn't waffle, he doesn't complain - he is willing to go - we hear: *Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you."* Then he does something to demonstrate his commitment. He destroys the instruments of his former life - he is all in, he is totally committed to follow. He only looks forward and does not intend to drop the mission to return to the old way.

In the Gospel, the people who say they will follow Jesus make requests similar to Elisha asking to kiss his parents, but Jesus knew that they were not committed. Their requests to bury family members, or to take leave of their family really were showing their ties to the past. They were looking to hold on to one who had died, or to essentially check with their family first to see if it was ok. This is not the commitment that Jesus is looking for - it is a weak commitment that someday will fail. Jesus wants us to participate in his mission, he wants us to be willing to let go of the past (including resentments, regrets, unfinished goals that will never be finished) so that we can be free to follow the path of discipleship. Jesus says elsewhere: *If anyone comes to me but loves his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—or even life—more than me, he cannot be my follower.* He is not really saying to completely abandon all that, but rather to place it in perspective and put our duty to God as first. We do this not by abandoning our duties to family or to our health, but by not making them the end goal of our mission.

What is your ability, what is your mission in this life? In the end, it is to participate in Jesus' mission. In the end it is to follow a wise leader Jesus as Elisha followed Elijah. It is to learn (and let the wise teacher instruct you and draw you closer in the Eucharist), and to love our neighbors (which we do when we by giving of ourselves through activities of ministry and turn our hearts from anger and revenge to caring and mercy). We have the freedom to use the abilities Jesus has given us in many ways, but just like the superhero from the movies we can use that ability for the good of a greater mission, or for our own selfish needs. St. Paul cautions us today: *For you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.* What are your abilities? How is Jesus calling you to use these abilities at this point in your life as a disciple for a greater mission? You will need to pray, to educate yourself, and to open your hearts to his voice. In the end, this is the path to a life of satisfaction - a satisfaction that cannot be found in the way the world teaches - a satisfaction that comes from following Jesus and not looking back.