

June 28, 2020

2 Kgs 4:8-11,14-16a; Rom 6:3-4,8-11; Mt 10:37-42

What are you looking for out of life? What do you hope to find in life? There are the basic things that many of us hunt for in early and mid life so that we can be secure in later life. These things are things like financial security, a stable place to call our own, relationships with family and friends to surround us. These things, as important as they are, are not all there is to look for. These things can be part of creating a foundation upon which we built happiness, but happiness is not dependent on them. The other major thing to consider is our relationship with God and the life after this one.

What Jesus says in the Gospel today can be a bit unsettling: *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 after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* He isn't saying to fail to love our family, he is not saying don't partake responsibly of the things in life that give us security (like adequate finances, and housing, and relationships) - he is really talking about how much emphasis we put on these things. When these good things start to be the focus of life, when we begin to give more time to them than to God, when if given a choice between them and God we choose the temporary over the eternal - then we make ourselves unworthy.

We like to think of ourselves worthy of everything. We are so sure of our worthiness to receive everything, we forget a few things. First, that you can't just have what you want because you tell yourself you are worthy of it. You don't get to win the lottery because you believe that you are the most worthy one, you don't have things work out the way you want just because you feel that you deserve to get it that way ... you don't even get promotions at work necessarily because you are the most worthy. Second, none of us is worthy of what Jesus is offering.

We don't get the gift of eternal life because we are worthy, but because it is a gift. We can ... and this is the part that is tough to hear ... make ourselves unworthy to receive it. Not because the hand isn't there offering it, but because we are looking in the other direction. You can be floating in the ocean after a shipwreck and cling so tight to the life vest that you won't get into the Coast Guard boat come to pick you up. You may think that such a person did not really

make themselves worthy of the rescue. Yes, that sounds wrong because our heads are so filled with the idea that we are worthy of everything, and not too open to the idea that we have responsibility in this rescue as well. Receiving Baptism is a first step to fulfilling this responsibility. Following through with the promises of that Baptism by following Jesus is another. Being nourished by the Eucharist and doing all that is involved in receiving it worthily are others.

Jesus tells us that we have to take up our cross - the first time in the Gospel of Matthew that he refers to the cross. If Jesus tells us that we have to take on responsibility, which will not always be pleasant, in order to reach the final goal. However, don't forget that he promises to walk with us, to help carry that cross, and that he will be there at the end of the journey. To say to him "actually, I hear what your saying, but I really am much more worthy than that. Why don't you just carry the cross yourself, let me do what I want to do, not help anyone else carry their cross, and then you can meet me and give me a gift at the end."

We see a different take that that from the woman in the first reading who sees the value in the holiness of Elisha, who wants to have that holiness and wisdom close to her, and so she goes to the trouble of preparing a room for him. She wasn't looking for something for herself, but just to give reverence to the holy. She didn't ask for a reward, but just sought to cling more to the words of the prophet than to her own comfort. She wasn't just padding her own nest, but helping to make one for a person who needed it. And look what happened ... the reward came unexpectedly. This is the approach we need to focus on with God. As St. Paul tells us today, we have to die with Christ to live with him. That is we have to join with Jesus who died to the selfishness that believes ourselves more worthy than others, died to the focus on this present temporary life as the only route to happiness, died to the idea that I don't want to let go of that life preserver to get into the boat. Only after this death to the temporary world can we open ourselves to live with Christ. Live with him in this life as a living part of his Body. A body that is focused on care of its members and serves them while praising God - who really is the one who is worthy - and living in a Body that is destined to live with Christ in the next life. This is where we have the chance to gain something that is truly and eternally satisfying.