

13th Sunday in Ord. Time -- June 27-28, 2020

Today's Scripture readings are quite challenging – more than usual -- as Jesus has finished instructing his disciples and is now ready to send them out on mission.

Earlier in his instructions and preparation of his disciples for their mission he had spoken of the worthiness or lack of worthiness of those who would receive or reject the message they would be bringing. Today, he speaks about their own worthiness and ours to be his disciples. “Whoever loves father or mother more than me, **he says**, is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Even more challenging are his words that “whoever does not take up his cross and follow after **him** are not worthy of **him**”

All these words would have been quite a test and quite a demand in Jesus' day when loyalty to one's family was so strong in the Jewish culture, but to demand that **they and we** be willing to follow him to the humiliating and painful death of the cross was an even greater challenge.

However, then Jesus adds that “whoever loses his life for his sake will find it.” Those who seek happiness in life by pursuing their own interests will never be fulfilled. But those giving themselves to God and others will experience the lasting fulfillment that God wants us to have.

Jesus tells us not to let anything or anyone (even those closest to us, even our own lives) be more important than he is. He does not make this request for his own glorification. He isn't looking for worldly glory. He asks us to give him central place in our hearts and in our lives for our own sake and for our own happiness. We will never really be satisfied in life until we possess and are fully possessed by the life that Christ came to bring us.

The gospel is not always a “feel good” message. Some people only want to hear peace, love and joy when they come to Church. They want a Church that

always makes them “feel good.” Peace, love and joy are wonderful and Jesus’ promise of lasting happiness fills us with hope, and preachers like to preach about these things, **but sometimes**, like today, the gospel is not easy to hear. Being willing to make serious changes in our life, and being willing to give up everything for Christ, even our own lives (as many have done) is a hard message.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, spent the last two years of his life in prison under Adolf Hitler in Germany. One of the most memorable lines from his writings is this: “When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.” Following Christ can cost us dearly. If we are afraid of that, if we are always looking for Church that doesn’t really challenge us, then we are not really wanting to hear Christ.

All of this is a message that the Church needs to hear in our present time. It seems that we have lost the priority of God not only in our world, but in our life as Christians and as a Church. There are so many ways that we need to get caught up to where we should be in the living out of our faith. I include myself and my ministry in this assessment. For example, so many come to Mass every Sunday, but really do not understand the meaning of the Mass and how it remembers and joins us to Christ’s on-going gift and sacrifice of himself to God the Father and for the sake of the world. Talking about the deeper meaning of the Mass is something I will deal with in future homilies.

But for today, we have Paul in today’s second reading expressing his frustration that many Christians do not seem to realize that Baptism is a life-changing event. Paul asks if they (and we) are unaware that we were “co-buried” with Christ into his suffering and death. Paul wants them to understand that in Baptism they took on a new identity. They are no longer just Mary or John, but Mary-in-Christ and John-in-Christ. As they die to their old ways and habits and adopt the will and the ways of the Risen Lord, they are transformed into him. They become one body and mind with him.

The early Church writers boldly describe this experience as becoming other Christ's in the world and want them to continue learning what it means to die to sin and live for God.

In a similar vein, today's first reading about the woman and her husband who built an addition on their home for the prophet Elisha to stay when he came through their area is a great illustration of how we need to make room in our lives for what we value as they did in their hospitality to Elisha. To make room for Christ, we have to clean out all the closets that sin still occupies within us. We can't ask Christ to enter into our lives if there is no place for him to sit, or it's too loud to hear him when he speaks. We know all this, yet we still think that we can hang on to some not so good things but let Christ have free access to the rest of our house. Yet, if we've got bitter things put in the drawers all around us, where's the space to receive what he brings?

We all need to work on putting God first in our life and loving Him above all things as Jesus has commanded. Finding ways for our families to keep God first in our lives is one of the important tasks of parents in their families. Last Sunday we celebrated Father's day and one of the things we are most grateful for in our fathers is the way that they give spiritual leadership to our families. And again, putting God first in our lives and families is not so much for God's sake but for our sake and for our happiness in this life and in the next. We have not give to much attention to this in our Catholic Communities, but one of the simplest and most concrete ways to remind ourselves of the priority of God in our lives is to practice tithing or the giving back to God each week or month of a first portion of the blessings of time, talent and treasure that we have received from God.

The woman in the first reading was rewarded the gift of a son for her generosity to the prophet Elisha. Jesus promises a prophet's reward to whomever receives a prophet, and that not even the simple gift of a cup of water to one who is a disciple will go

without a reward. The promises of the Lord challenge us, but also offer us great rewards.

As St. Paul writes in our second reading -- “We were indeed buried with him -- so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too might live in newness of life.” Because of Christ’s resurrection, death no longer has power over us! Life is indeed good, but even when it isn’t – it is good.

This may be seem difficult to swallow when we are down and out and suffering and struggling. But life is good -- not because it is comfortable, refreshing or even enjoyable, but because it is an amazing gift from God.

Our gospel reading calls us to love Christ more than life itself. Contrary to our natural instinct for survival and our desire for comfort, we are to take up our crosses and follow the one who died on his cross. That is our call. But the story is not cut short there, for the cross leads to new life. A life that truly is good and worth more than other person or thing.