

28 June 2020

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 10:37-42

Wow. Three times Jesus warns his Apostles about not being worthy of him. That's a big change from what we heard last week—how we are more precious to God than many sparrows and how God knows the number of hairs on our heads. **“You're precious to me,” then “You better love me above all else or you are unworthy of being associated with me.**

A couple things: 1. I think even though these readings are a stark contrast in feeling, I think they summarize the two most important facts of our lives: We are **LOVED by God, and we are CALLED by God.** I've said it before....If we just know we are called to be good but don't know we are loved and precious to God, then we become hardened people, unmerciful, tough on others as we are on ourselves. And...if we just know we're loved but not also called to be His light through actions in our lives, then our lives will be insubstantial. If I had to pick one or the other, I'd pick being loved and unaware of my call—ignorance is bliss!—but I know that the fullness of who God made me to be, growing as a person and glorifying God with my life means being, every day of my life, fully aware of both.

Second, I think **it's helpful to look at the flow of all of chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel account,** which stands as a separate unit. The twelve Apostles are gathered and listed by name. He commissions them to go out without money or shoes and proclaim that “The Kingdom of God is at hand!” He tells them “What you have received without cost, give without cost.” He warns them that they will face a lot of rejection, even being dragged before governors who could take their lives (eleven of the Twelve would be martyred as it turned out). Then, to give them courage, he tells them not to be afraid of anyone—we heard that last week—because they are precious to God. Then, just before what we hear today Jesus tells them that proclaiming his Kingdom will be a cause of division and family members will turn against one another over this issue. THEN comes today's reading. After hearing of the division that will come between families, he tells them to stay rooted in what saves their souls—the love of God, and to love God above all else. Then finishing with the mystical union of disciple and Jesus: Whoever receives you receives me.

So, it's sort of a **wave of comfort and warning, comfort and demand.** And it's not that God sometimes loves us and sometimes demands from us; it's always both receiving the love and living out the love. **But it is like our experience, isn't it?** In marriages, any relationship, there are times when it's easy to rest secure in love and all is well, and other times when more effort is demanded. Same with any committed relationship...same with life of a disciple. And today's Gospel selection recounts the time of demand.

So, he's telling them, “It's going to happen, you'll meet resistance and people, even your own families, won't like you because of me.” That's why they have to love God above the others—because the others are making them choose. Without that context, it can sound like the Apostles are supposed to take the initiative to rank God against their families. Ideally, this never has to happen, but if it does, be ready.

I have to admit that I have not known this level of conflict between my faith or moral conviction and my family or friends. But I know **others have**. 1. **A man brings home his fiancé of another skin color**. His parents are untroubled but the grandmother throws a fit and won't allow the fiancé into her home. Does the man say "Honey, that's just the way grandma is, don't worry about it. You stay here and I'll go see grandma alone?" Or, and this is what happened, does he say, "If I can't take my fiancé with me, that is an insult to both of us and I will not go to grandma's house." I hope grandma will find a way to love her grandson and his soon to be wife, but so far they are not talking. 2. I know **one woman who for the safety and good of others needed to say something—had to expose a truth—that made everyone else in the extended family very uncomfortable**. She found the courage to say it...and now for over a year no one in the family will talk to her. Most people wouldn't have the courage, but she found strength in God, and in her own spouse. That's a very hard place to be. To love God, to love the good of all, to love Love itself more than just playing along with something unhealthy and hurtful. I admire their courage.

Not all disagreements will demand that level of rupture in relationships. Remember to never let your disagreements go without offering a cup of water. That is, it is important to do our best to maintain a loving attitude in times of stress and disagreement. I love the story of **Ronald Reagan and Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil, enemies during the day in bitter opposition** to each other's political positions. But they were cordial with each other, as often the President would invite the Speaker to the White House for drinks in the evening. The first time that happened, **the Speaker expressed his surprise at being treated so graciously after a day of fighting**. **"There's no enemies after six o'clock," the President said. Wouldn't that be awesome if we could all live like that??**

It should be that way when we come to Eucharist. We come to the table (oh, these COVID days make us image more than do these things...) from all different walks of life with different convictions about politics and even without our religion, but at Communion time we unite. **There are no enemies when we share Eucharist**. That's something to work toward, knowing it doesn't work out that way for all people all the time, and they live with the pain of alienation.

Last consideration: All of Matthew 10 is about being an intense follower of Jesus. So, let me ask you, **if you were going to take the next step in being a better follower of Jesus, what would it be?** It might come to you immediately, which is a good sign that it's something to pursue immediately! It might take more discernment. After you identify this next step on a closer walk with Jesus, **then ask yourself what resistance you might find in your life—within you and among your friends and family. Then ask Jesus if it is worth the cost.**

Then, chapter 10 closes with “Whoever receives you receives me.” And “whoever gives a drink of water to a disciple because he is a disciple will not lose his reward.” At first blanch, that can sound weird, like why does giving to a thirsty disciple deserve a greater reward than giving to anyone who is thirsty?

This is interesting to me. Indeed in Matthew 25, 15 chapters later in this account, whoever gives food to a hungry person gives to Jesus himself...when I was thirsty you gave me to drink. But here in chapter 10 it's not the poor who are the focus—the whole chapter is about the mission of the Apostles and it ends with Jesus identifying with them. When people show YOU kindness, they are showing me kindness, because I live in you.

So, in chapter 10, he prepares them, he scares them, he reassures them, he warns them and finally he invites them into the awesome awareness that they are his representatives and he lives in them.