

Deacon Mark homily June 28, 2020

Read: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a (97A); Romans 6:3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10:37-42

There are many beautiful messages in our reading today. I would like to narrow in on two of them; one being about rewards, the rewards God gives us and the other about the necessity of you and me making the Lord number one in our lives. God must be the center of our life. As a young man, I struggled with the passages that we just heard. That to be worthy of Jesus, I have to love him more than father or mother, daughter or son. I remember when I was in high school in religious education and we were discussing these scripture passages and no matter what Sr. Ann said, I just didn't get it. The people I loved most were the people in my family. I loved no one as much as I loved my father, mother, brothers, and sisters. Why would God make me choose between Him and my family? I knew I was always to choose the truth and the good and the right, but I struggled with loving anyone more than my family. What was I missing? What did I not understand? In my early 20's, I started to understand it a little bit more. When I met a young woman that became my wife, I discovered a different kind of love, the love of a spouse. And the thought of choosing God over my wife became a new question in my mind. All that I had been taught was bouncing around like a pinball. To love God above all other and that my relationship with him was the most important one. But I did not feel it in my heart and reading it did not make it so. Then I had a profound experience in my life and God touched my heart and changed me. He spoke to me in the real-life experiences of a friend and I saw the transformation of my friend with my own eyes but even more so with the eyes of my heart. For the first time in my life I saw and experienced the love and presence of God and I was a changed man. I wanted to know Jesus Christ. I wanted to talk about Jesus Christ. I wanted to praise His Holy name. I was, for the first time in my life, in love with Jesus Christ and He filled me with a joy that is second to none. He was no longer just a special man in history, He was and is my Lord and Savior. He gave me a love in faith that I never thought possible. As I reflect on that experience in my life, it reminds me of what Peter, James and John experienced at the transfiguration of Jesus. There was no doubt, this was the work of God. I came to the realization that the struggle with having to love God more than those closest to me was because I did not know, I did not really know who Jesus was. I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus, I did with my family, but I did not

with my Lord. I have not spent enough time with Jesus to know Him. I had not spoken or listened to Him enough. If we want to know someone, we must spend time with them; it is the same with our Lord. And none of us want to meet Him at the end of this life and hear Him say I do not know you. Jesus told us in Matthew's Gospel: for who ever does the will of my Father, in Heaven, is my brother and sister and mother. God is our true Father. What I found out was that our love for God magnifies our love for everyone else in our lives. It's not our doing; it's the work of the Holy Spirit. We, on our part, must open the door and let Him into our lives. When we do that, our hearts put Him first and He fills us with all that we need. Our Lord comes to us first, that is what scripture teaches us and that is what I have experienced firsthand. We must remember that everything is a gift. We exist because God has willed to give us life, not only this life here on earth but also eternal life with Him in Heaven, the greatest of all rewards. We are called to be His hands and His feet and His voice here on earth. We are to be like prophets, spokes people for God, in a little corner of our world. In our Gospel reading, we heard Jesus speak about giving rewards. Whoever welcomes a prophet or a holy man or even gives a cup of cold water to one of His disciples will not go without his reward. Just such a reward is what the lady of Shunem as we heard in the first reading from the second book of Kings. Her reward is representative of her eternal reward in Heaven. This reading has a special place in my heart and in the heart of my family. Elisha, the prophet, would stay at the couple's home in Shunem whenever he travelled to Mount Carmel. The couple were up in their years and were never able to have children. She knew that Elisha was a Holy man, a prophet, and she and her husband out of their love and generosity offered their home as a place of rest and nourishment to the Holy travelers. When the prophet Elisha asked why the woman was sad, he was told that she had no son. It was then the prophet promised her that she would give birth to a son the next year; what a reward the woman received. Nearly 40 years ago, my wife and I had a visitor. We've never seen him before or since. He was I need of a place to stay, and we offered him our home. He stayed only one night. We feed him a gave him a place to sleep and had some wonderful conversations. Most of the conversation was about our little son, who God gave us through the process of adoption. We were not able to have a biological child. We were so proud of our son and we hoped to adopt a daughter as soon as possible. Well, about 9 months after the visit of this young stranger, my wife gave birth to our first daughter. We never put

the elements together until about 1 year after his visit when our daughter was 3 months old. It was on this date in 1981, my wife was holding our daughter during Saturday evening mass, the 13th Sunday in ordinary time that we are celebrating today. And at the words of Elisha the prophet this time next year you will be fondling a baby son. At those words and at that moment, it was like the Holy Spirit tapped me on the shoulder and said remember the young man that you helped; behold you daughter. We broke into uncontrollable tears, almost unable to speak but to say to one another the young man that we helped. Do not ever think that God does not work in our lives and that He does not reward you for receiving a prophet or a Holy man, or even offering a cold cup of water to one of His disciples. Jesus said whoever receives you receives me and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. None of us are worthy of the rewards that God gives us; they are gifts and we must learn to except them by getting to know the giver and He will be our greatest love. And do not be concerned about choosing God over others we love. Instead, strive to know Him personally and to seek His will in your life and He will strengthen you and help you make the right choices and He will enhance and multiply your love for all your brother and sisters. God's love conquers all things.