

13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A 2020

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

First Reading (2 Kgs 4:8-11.14-16). This tells about a beautiful act of hospitality, and how God rewarded it. The episode is designed to enhance the reputation of Elijah, and to encourage the virtue of hospitality, especially towards a 'man of God'. A 'man of God' in this context means bearer of God's word. This prepares us for what the Gospel says about the importance of showing hospitality to the envoys of Christ.

Gospel (Mt 10:37-42). This is the conclusion of the Mission Sermon (10: 1-42) given by Jesus to the Apostles before he sent them out. Here he instructs the Apostles on the sacrifices involved, and the priorities they must embrace, in being his envoys to the world. Following him will require difficult choices in relation both to family ties and life.

They must be ready if needs be to sacrifice the dearest thing in life. In certain (rare) circumstances they might have to choose between him and their own relatives. But generosity will bring generous rewards. Jesus also issues a challenge to those who hear the message of the envoys to receive them properly. The smallest act of hospitality to his envoys will not go unrewarded.

To receive a person's envoy is to receive the person himself. Welcome given to an envoy is a sign of openness to his mission and word. Receiving the missionaries is receiving Jesus, and receiving him is receiving the God who sent him.

Second Reading (Rom 6:3-4.8-11). Baptism is a communion with the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. To be baptised means to die to what is sinful in order to live the Christian life that comes to us from the risen Saviour. Just as Jesus emerged from the tomb a totally new being, so we are totally changed by baptism. The challenge then is to live up to what we are.

Reflection

The Gospel today brings the first two readings together. We must love God more than anything or anyone. We must love Christ more than our parents, our sisters, our brothers, our children—more than anyone. This statement never implies not loving our parents, sisters, brothers, children, etc., but simply tells us that God is more important.

If we are looking for our own life, we shall lose that life. If we are seeking the life of Jesus, we shall have our own life. It is only in giving up our lives that we are given life. This is one of the great challenges of following Jesus. The more we deny ourselves, the more life of Jesus we have. Again the strong reminder: when we deny ourselves, we are doing this out of love and not out of any other motive. If we judge others, then we condemn ourselves. If we seek simply what the Lord asks of us today and every day, we are blessed—over and over and over.

The Lord gives us two teachings in this Gospel reading: one about carrying our cross and the other about hospitality. With many family visits at this time of year, carrying a cross and hospitality can be the same thing.

Firstly, the cost of discipleship:

Jesus says, 'anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me'. The 'cross' is a metaphor for sacrifice. Jesus is saying that discipleship will involve sacrifice.

Jesus' words about our carrying the cross are very dramatic and distressing. Before this section, the Lord said that he came for division, to separate mother and daughter, father and son. Here, Jesus says, that if we love our relatives more than we love him, we are not worthy of him.

These words were on target in the early Church when the decision to become Christian tore families apart because Christianity was so incompatible with everything around it. When people became Christian, they separated themselves from a whole network of social and business contacts. Becoming a Christian was a major decision. It wasn't just a private choice. It had serious consequences.

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Jesus himself has given us the example. He chose the way of self-sacrifice and suffering. It wasn't that he was in love with suffering. No. It was because he chose the way of love. And love inevitable results in suffering. But it was through his suffering that he attained to glory. If we suffer with him on earth we will be glorified with him in heaven. And we have to follow Christ out of love. Love is the greatest motivating power of all. Love can make even the hardest sacrifice sweet. And love enables one to give absolutely everything, so that one has nothing left.

Secondly, the hospitality:

The hospitality Jesus describes is toward his Apostles, his messengers. Even though we might not care for the personality or style of one of his disciples, still the messenger deserves respect because of whom he represents.

The hospitality of the Church is not the hospitality of a four-star hotel where perfect manners are expected. Here, in the Church, we have the hospitality of grace, where people who don't

have Reader's Digest marriages, picture perfect lives, pluperfect discipleship and who have made mistakes – big ones and bad ones – can come to begin again.

The hospitality of grace is about helping people put the pieces back together. That's why weekly Mass is important for all of us. We all have crosses to carry which don't go on vacation for the summer. Here is the place where we can come to renew our vision, revive our commitment to Christ, relight our baptismal candle, clean off our baptismal garment, restore our baptismal dignity, reclaim our place at the Lord's Table, and slowly remodel our lives.

The Church is a place they can call home, where they can renew their spiritual strength, remove the stains from their baptismal garment, and relight their baptismal candle. We can make the effort to show them the magnificent hospitality of Jesus Christ.

Hospitality is a beautiful thing. But nowadays hospitality is a very different matter from what it was in the old days when nobody locked their doors. Sadly, those days are gone. Today is the day of locks, bolts, chains, peepholes, alarm systems, dogs... Yet, today there more need that ever for hospitality and friendliness. In the world today there is a lot of loneliness, and there are lots of strangers and displaced people.

Hospitality to a friend is no big deal. There is no risk involved and there is every likelihood that the favour will be returned. But hospitality to a stranger is a great thing. However, there is a risk involved.

But Christ calls us to welcome the strangers in our midst. To be hospitable does not mean making them like us. It means accepting them as they are. This enables them to shed their strangeness, and become members of the community.

Christ calls us to reach out. And the rewards are great he said that even a trivial act of kindness, like giving a cup of cold water, would not go unrewarded in heaven. But there are earthly rewards too, and every great ones – the growth of understanding, friendliness, and co-operation, things our neighbourhoods are crying out for. The followers of Christ, hospitality is not an optional extra. It is at the very heart of the Gospel. And the ultimate motivation is clear: to welcome to stranger is to welcome Christ himself.

Thirdly, a cup of cold water:

The "cup of cold water" is proverbially quoted as a somewhat dubious sign of Christian charity. Perhaps this is because it does not cost much in rain-drenched climates! In a hot, dusty climate, however, a drink of cold water can be a life-saver. The attitude of thoughtfulness, the lack of self-absorption; these would seem to underline the Christian attitude towards others. It is not what is given that counts but the heart with which it is given.

Jesus says that anyone who gives one of his disciples even a cup of cold water will be rewarded. Again, a cup of cold water isn't much. It is the biblical equivalent of our cup of tea. To give a cup of cold water is about the smallest thing we could do for another person. Yet in the desert it could be the difference between life and death. Which shows that a deed doesn't have to be big in order to mean a lot. Small deeds and small gift are very important.

Circumstances can magnify a small deed. A small deed can bring great comfort to a person provided it has a certain quality. That quality is warmth. All deeds that come from the heart have that quality.

Few of us are given the chance to perform great deeds. But the chance to give 'a cup of water' can come our way several times in the course of a day. The 'cup of cold water' is a symbol of the small kind deed. Little deeds may not look much, but they can bring peace. Small gestures can tell us more about a person's character than big gestures. Big gestures show us a person's power. Small gestures show us a person's humanity. Giving is at the heart of the Gospel. It is of the very essence of Christianity. It is through giving that the heart remains open and one becomes a loving person.

Conclusion: If we are looking for our own life, we shall lose that life. If we are seeking the life of Jesus, we shall have our own life. It is only in giving up our lives that we are given life. This is one of the great challenges of following Jesus. The more we deny ourselves, the more life of Jesus we have. Again the strong reminder: when we deny ourselves, we are doing this out of love and not out of any other motive. If we judge others, then we condemn ourselves. If we seek simply what the Lord asks of us today and every day, we are blessed—over and over and over.

May we seek the face of the Lord and respond to His love! May we accept the gifts of the Lord and know that in those gifts there is also hardship. May we die to ourselves in the very best way, but loving God first and always. Amen.

I would like to wish you and your family a great week.

Let us pray and ask God to stop the pandemic as soon as possible and we will be able to see each other in person.

Take care and keep warm!

God bless you and your family always.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Fr Tao Pham