

## **13<sup>TH</sup> Sunday of Ordinary time C/2007**

God calls each one of us to follow him and to share in his life. That call of God reaches out to us in the very ordinary circumstances of life where we live, and in things we do in the world. The readings of this Sunday talk about some vocations that took place in the history of salvation, how people reacted to them and the consequences that followed them.

The first reading describes how Elisha readily and generously responded to the call of Elijah to succeed him as the prophet of God. Elisha, who was an ordinary man and a farmer, did not expect at all to one day become a prophet. But when he saw the prophet Elijah throwing his mantel upon him, which is a symbolism similar to that of imposition of hands on people we use today, he understood that his life entered a turning point. With thanksgiving and trust in God, leaving everything behind him, he accepted the call and followed Elijah.

The courage to break with the past and to start an unknown future under the guidance of Jesus, that is what is lacking in the other people called in today's Gospel. That is why while they wanted first to go back to bury their dead or to say good bye to their family, Jesus told them that "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God".

With these words, Jesus does not say that, because we are Christians, we have to abandon our families, or never maintain any relationship with them any more. This would be a misinterpretation of his thoughts, because he knows well that we have to honor our parents. And he is the first to give us an example in this matter. In fact, what Jesus wanted to say to those who wanted to become his disciples, and us alike, is that before following him, we should count the cost. We cannot prefer our family or our own material security to him. To be Christian comprises a cost we have to accept.

Another point Jesus wants to make is that in everything there is a crucial moment; if that moment is missed the thing most likely will never be done at all. If you always delay your choice, you will end up by never choosing. As the psychologists tell us, every time we have a fine feeling and do not act on it, the less likely we are to act on it at all.

The last point Jesus wants to highlight is that life is lived by looking forward to building a future and not by turning to the past. There are some people whose hearts are always in the past, regretting what they have left or the choice they have made to the point of jeopardizing their present life. They walk forever looking backwards and thinking wistfully of the good old days. The watchword of God's kingdom is not "backwards", but "forwards". May Jesus help us to understand that we have made a choice for our life and we have to stick to it.

All this brings me to the idea of sacrifice. It seems to me that, by not allowing those who wanted to follow him to go to bury their dead or to say good bye to the family, Jesus wants to tell us that to be his disciples goes hand in hand with the acceptance of some sacrifices. I know that this is very tricky issue. I know that our culture of pleasure and enjoyment of life based on sex and money does not

accept such a claim. That is why sacrifice is always seen as something negative, as a constraint to the freedom of enjoyment of life and pleasure. And yet, the secular definition of the word, sacrifice, in “Webster’s New World” dictionary says, it is a “giving up of one thing for the sake of another”. As such, sacrifice is not negative; it means only that we renounce something for another more valuable; we give up something for another more important. It means also that we make a choice among many others, because that one is important for us and our life. It is like when we decline to buy an expensive car for a cheap one in order to save money for the vacation of our families or for the schooling of our children.

Someone told me that instead of saying that “I make a sacrifice”, say just “I make a choice” or “I do it because of love”. To make a choice because of love is true, but the reality we are dealing with by making a choice, that is what we call sacrifice. The reality of renouncing something for the sake of another does not change because we use another terminology. As far as we are embedded in the culture of pleasure with the idea that sacrifice is negative, we will be in trouble when the time will come to make a serious choice and to give up some privilege in order to live fully.

What do we learn from today’s readings? First, we learn that God calls us regardless of our merits and of who we are and how we are. If he is able to do so, he is also capable of changing us to fit the mission he gives us. For that, we have to trust him, to break with our past, and to focus on the future. Our freedom in Jesus, St Paul says, should not be a pretext to live according to the desires of the flesh, by seeking self-indulgence. The motivation of our action should be the law of the love of our fellow humans and never something else.

We learn, also, that life is made up of sacrifice. Call it renouncement or choice, as you like, but do not forget it. For Elisha, it consisted in burning the instruments he used to plow in his past life of farmer. For us today, it means to make a journey through life with Jesus who went to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us. It is impossible to take the easy way by becoming Jesus’ disciple.

Finally, the call of God is always an invitation, and never an imposition. For those who accept, they become part of Jesus’ mission. For those who refuse, God shows his mercy and his patience. God’s patience is the foundation of the conversion of heart. Unlike James and John who wanted a fire to come down to destroy those who did not welcome Jesus, we are invited to tolerate each other. Tolerance is the condition of living together and of a world freed from violence. The only fire we need is that of the Holy Spirit that transforms the hearts of people, making them better than they were before. May God bless you all.



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**1 Kings 19, 16b. 19-21; Galatians 5, 1. 13-18; Luke 9, 51-62**