

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The readings of this Sunday talk about vocation. They try to show us how some people in the past have reacted to God's call and what all that means for us today.

The first reading describes how Elisha succeeded Elijah as the prophet of God. What is particular with this text is the fact that Elisha was an ordinary man and a farmer. He did not expect at all that one day he would become a prophet. Nothing prepared him either by birth or by profession to be a man of God.

But, once Elijah threw his mantel on his shoulders, he understood that something serious was happening that would transform his life forever. With courage, he left his work, burned the instruments of plowing and put himself to the service of God.

The courage to break with the past and to start an unknown future under Jesus' guidance is what was lacking in the people called in today's Gospel. With such an attitude, it was absolutely clear that Jesus would react in the way we heard in the Gospel: - "Let the dead bury their dead"... - "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what he left behind is fit for the kingdom of God".

What does Jesus mean by using such words? Does he invite us to abandon our families or to hate our relatives because of him? Not really; otherwise, that would be a misunderstanding of his statements. What Jesus wants to tell us is, first, that if we want to become his disciples, we have to count the cost. To be a disciple is not an easy way. It comprises a price to pay, because we cannot prefer our family or our own material security to him. This is true in many ways when we look closely at our relationships with relatives and friends. How many among us have been having such difficult times because they are Christians or because they take seriously their faith in God!

Second, Jesus wants to tell us that in everything, there is always a crucial moment. When God calls us, we have to take it seriously and respond accordingly. When we delay a positive answer to the call, we miss an opportunity he gives us. The trouble, however, is that we are not really sure if the opportunity we miss today will be there again tomorrow. How many people I have met walking with a broken heart for having missed opportunities that would have changed their lives forever and for the best!

Third, Jesus wants to tell us that life is lived by looking forward and not backward. From the past, we draw lessons in order to build a new future. We should not live by looking backward. We have to turn the page of the past and write a new page of our life with Jesus. This is a very serious matter, because there are people who are prisoners of the past. They live in the past and regret continually what they have left or the choice they have made to the point of jeopardizing their present life.

All this brings me to the idea of sacrifice. In fact, it seems to me that, by not allowing those people to go to bury their dead or to say goodbye to the family, Jesus wants to tell us that to be a disciple has something to do with sacrifice.

I know that this is a very difficult theme, because of our culture of pleasure and enjoyment of life based on sex and money. For that reason, sacrifice is always seen as something negative, as a constraint to the freedom of enjoyment of life and pleasure. And yet, the definition of the word, sacrifice, in the dictionary says, it is a “giving up of one thing for the sake of another”.

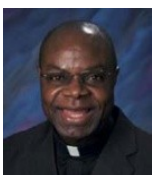
As such, sacrifice is not negative; it means only that we renounce something for another more valuable; we give up something for another more important. It means also that we make a choice among many others, because that one is important for us and our life. It is like when we decline to buy an expensive 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 of making a choice, that is what we call sacrifice. The reality of renouncing something for the sake of another more valuable does not change because we use different 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 these readings? First, we learn that God reaches out to us in the very ordinary circumstances of life where we live, and in things we do in the world. He calls us to work for him regardless of our merits and of who we are and how we are. If that is the case, he is able to change us in order to correspond to the mission he wants to give us. For that reason, we have to trust him and to break with our past in order to build a new future with him.

We learn also that life is made up of sacrifice. You can 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 a 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.

Lastly, we learn that God’s call is always an invitation, and never an imposition. We have to decide and God respects our freedom. For those who refuse, God shows his mercy and his patience. That is why he did not send his fire from heaven to destroy those who did not welcome Jesus, as John and James were proposing. By doing so, God teaches us tolerance and invites us to tolerate each other in spite of our disagreement. Tolerance is the condition of living together and of a world freed from violence. Let us ask the Lord for the grace of trusting him when he calls us to work for him. May God bless you all!



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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
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**1 Kings 19, 16b, 19-21; Galatians 5, 1, 13-18; Luke 9, 51-62**