

Thirteenth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the vocation of the servant of God. They show that God calls us to work for him in various and different ways. They invite us to listen to God's call, to follow him and to dedicate our life to the cause of his kingdom. .

The first reading describes the vocation of the prophet Elisha. In fact, Elisha was a farmer who did not expect at all to become a prophet. Once Elijah visited him and threw his cloak over him, he left his farm and his family and followed him. In order to show his resolve, he burned his plowing equipment and slaughtered the oxen and became Elijah's attendant.

What is behind this text is the idea that God calls us in the very ordinary circumstances of life, when we expect the least and where we live in the world. Another idea is the truth that anyone is called to work for the Lord regardless of our merits, our titles and our initial profession. The last idea we find in the text is about the courage we need in order to break with our past and to accept to work for the Lord.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus calls different people to follow him. First of all, the Gospel reports that when his time had come, Jesus resolved to go to Jerusalem. At that time, he sent messengers ahead of him in order to prepare a reception for him in the village of Samaria. Unfortunately, he was not welcomed.

Because of this incident, James and John, two of his disciples, wanted to retaliate by calling down a fire from heaven to consume that village. But Jesus rebuked them and they continued to another village.

As they were on their way, someone proposed to follow Jesus wherever he would go. But, Jesus reminded him that, while animals and birds have dens and nests, he himself has no place to rest.

In continuing the journey, Jesus saw two people to whom he proposed to follow him. While the first wanted initially to go to bury his dad, the second wanted at the outset to go to say good-bye to his family. To the one Jesus answered to let the dead bury their dead and to the other he reminded that anyone who sets his hand on a plow and looks backs is unfit for the kingdom of God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first point I want to highlight is about the importance of making the decision now, for Jesus. In today's Gospel, it seems as though Jesus is insensitive to the reality of family when he says to let the dead bury their dead or does not approve the gentleman who wants to say good bye to his family.

The problem is deeper than that; it is all about the decision to make for God right away. In fact, we live in a culture, where we are told not to rush things and to take our time. Of course, it is important to slow down, to reflect and to mature what we have to do.

The trouble, however, is that what is profitable in ordinary life might not be beneficial for our relationship with God. In fact, human experience has taught us that the chances we lose today, we might not have them tomorrow. The grace we have today to listen to this word of his and his invitation to change, we might not have them tomorrow, because things can happen in between, which make such a possibility impossible.

Therefore, it is always wise to seize the grace of the moment when it comes our way. That is why it would be foolish to think that we still have time. We never know what tomorrow brings us. I believe that is what Jesus wants to tell those people so that they come to understand how it is crucial not to delay the decision they have to make for the kingdom. As experience has taught us, many people have broken hearts today because they missed the opportunity that would have changed their lives forever and for the best.

The second point I want to highlight is about the importance of sacrifice. What I also sense behind the words of Jesus is the sense of sacrifice. In fact, it seems to me that, by not allowing those people to go bury their dead or to say goodbye to the family, Jesus wants to tell us that to be his disciple is demanding and requires some sacrifice on our part.

In that sense, it would be difficult to be a disciple without paying the price of what it means. If we want to satisfy at all cost our own desires and emotions, it will be very difficult to respond correctly to God. Of course, this is an unpleasant subject because of the configuration of our society based on the culture of pleasure and enjoyment of life through money and sex. But, that is the truth and the way it is.

In fact, 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.

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. The truth is that it is impossible to take the easy way when we want to serve God seriously, because Jesus himself did not do that.

We pray today that the Lord may awaken our conscience to the reality of his call to work for him in spite of our indignity. Let us ask him the grace to understand that we cannot please him if we do not accept some sacrifice in our life. Let us ask him the grace to fulfill his will in our life through our service of our fellows. May God bless you all!

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



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