

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C2022

God reaches out to us in the very ordinary circumstances of life and when we expect it the least. He calls us from where we live and in the things we do in the world. He calls us to work for him regardless of our merits and of our personal history. None of us can feel less valuable than others because he is not gifted enough or because he is late to come to faith. We are all called as we are, in the same way, for the same mission, by the same the Lord.

This truth is evidenced in the call of Elisha. He was an ordinary man, a farmer. He did not expect at all to become a prophet one day. When he saw the prophet Elijah throwing his mantel upon him, which is a symbol of succession, he understood that his life was entering a turning point. He was called to the change of career. Like Elisha, the other gentlemen of the Gospel were also called out of any expectation. The first was called while he was mourning his father, and the second while he was at family business.

Though God's call is freely given and regardless of merits, it is, however, demanding. One has to distance from initial occupation of his life in order to respond correctly to God. He has to give an immediate response to God's call. For Elisha, it meant to leave his farm, to slaughter the oxen, to burn the plowing equipment. While for Elisha, it was easy to leave his past life, things were difficult for the gentlemen of the Gospel. They wanted first to go burying their dead and saying good bye to the family. To them, Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God".

Jesus is right because life is lived by looking forward in building the future and not by turning to the past. There are people whose hearts are always in the past, regretting what they have left behind them and 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".

In order words, the logic of the kingdom of God requires of us the courage to break with the past and to start an unknown future under Jesus' guidance. Anyone lacking that courage will always be hesitating to make a decision in favor of Jesus and for the things of God. This point is very crucial because we live in a culture in which 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 the decision to make. The trouble, however, is that what is profitable in ordinary life might not be beneficial for our eternal life.

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 the word of God and his invitation to change, might not have been gives us again tomorrow. Many 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 and to make a decision for our eternal life.

It would be foolish to think that we still have time or we still are young. We never know what tomorrow brings us. I believe that is what Jesus wants to tell those people he

called so that they do not delay the decision to make for the sake of the kingdom. As we know by experience, many people are today brokenhearted and full of regrets and remorse for the missed opportunities that would have changed their lives for the best.

It seems to me that, by not allowing those people he called to go bury their dead or to say goodbye to the family, Jesus wants to tell us that to be his disciple requires some sacrifice on our part. It would be difficult to be a good disciple without paying the price of what it means. As St Paul said in the second reading, if we want to satisfy our own desires, passions and emotions, it will be very difficult to respond correctly to God.

This is an unpleasant subject in our society and culture based on pleasure and enjoyment of life through money and sex. In such culture, sacrifice is always seen as something negative as a constraint to the freedom of enjoyment of life and pleasure. And yet, sacrifice is not always negative. It means only that we renounce something for another more valuable; we give up something for another more important. It is like when we decline to buy an expensive car for a cheap one in order to save money for the vacation or the schooling of our children.

As long as we are stuck in the culture of pleasure with the idea that sacrifice is negative, we will be in trouble when it is about serving seriously Jesus and being a good disciple. We have to pray that the Lord will awaken our conscience to the demands of his Kingdom and set us free.

Now, let me finish. The call of God comes to us in different circumstances of life and independently of our merits. However, God does not force our hand. His call to us 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 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 tolerance. 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!

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



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