
***Given June 25/26, 2016 - Holy Spirit Catholic Church
Homily for the 13th Week in Ordinary Time – Year C***

Imagine someone who own a large and successful company, let's call it EJ Inc.; they're doing good things. The widgets they sell are top grade and in high demand. Imagine also that the sole owner of this company is getting on in years but there are no obvious heirs to take over once his time is finished.

Imagine also that one day the owner, let's call him Mr. Eli Jay is walking past the local business college and it happens to be graduation day. They're out in the grass in front of the auditorium are all the new graduates still in their cap and gown taking pictures with family and friends and thinking of their future.

Suddenly Mr. Jay walks right up to a new graduate, sticks out his hand and leads with the line "Hi, I'm Mr. Jay, owner of EJ Inc. and you're getting the company when I retire. Welcome aboard! You'll be my apprentice for a few weeks then I'm going to retire to a permanent vacation and the whole thing will be yours."

The new graduate, now owner-to-be, is astounded but quickly runs off to say goodbye to his family and friends, sells off or gives away all the stuff in his old dorm room and gets ready to get things going at EJ Inc.

This is about how things go with the prophet Elijah and the prophet-to-be Elisha. There's Elisha out in the field, probably thinking about the stable future he is going to have doing what he expected to be doing when suddenly up comes Elijah out of nowhere and throws his prophet's mantle over him, symbolizing that Elijah has claimed him for this new and unexpected role. Like the new graduate he runs off, sets things in order and prepares to follow his new master.

But...this is a seemingly ridiculous thing to do! Why would Elijah just throw his mantle over some guy in the field and why would that person go with him as if it made perfect sense? If a Wendy's employee comes up and puts their uniform hat on my head I'm not going to drop everything I'm doing and go work at Wendy's. But Elisha does just that. He goes with Elijah and eventually becomes the prophet after Elijah is taken up into heaven.

So why does Elisha go? Why does he drop everything and follow this guy he just met? Maybe he knew Elijah and had heard of him. Maybe he was looking to get out from behind the oxen. Maybe a bunch of things. But when it really gets down to it there was no worldly reason; he went with Elijah because Elijah called him, which meant God was calling him. And he decided to accept that call. Why? Freedom!

Now, I understand that here it is approaching the 4th of July and I'm preaching about Freedom but I don't mean the kind of freedom we're talking about when we usually use that word about to talk about "American freedoms."

What I'm talking about is the Freedom of following God. The Freedom in Following God, the Christian concept of Freedom that is much richer and more beautiful. Christian freedom is the freedom to love, to serve, and to give one's self for others without worldly or sinful hindrance.

Elisha sees this freedom in the choice to follow God by following Elijah and it is the same freedom, and one even more profound that Christ offers us in the Gospel.

In the Old Testament the people's relationship with God, their way to stay in right living was to follow the letter of the law. If you did X, Y and Z things you were good to go. It was a good system and better than the pagan religions around them but it wasn't the radical freedom that is on offer in Christianity. The radical freedom that Christianity offers is that

we don't need an explicit list of all the things we can and can't do. We weigh everything in light of love.

A quick example that captures the difference: In the bathroom of any restaurant there is a sign that says "Employees must wash hands before returning to work." The law exists for some planned good: clean hands – versus – no sign needed because everyone automatically washes their hands out of love for their neighbor, not wanting them to get sick. Augustine puts it even more simply: "Love God and do what you will."

We are a little scandalized perhaps when Christ tells his questioners to not worry with burying the dead or saying goodbye to their family before following him, especially since it seemed just done back in the book of Kings when Elisha took care of things before he left to follow Elijah. But Jesus isn't saying we shouldn't have funerals or be considerate of those who might miss us.

Rather he saying: Don't worry about the X, Y and Z of heaped up obligations; love me, give yourself to me first of all and then you will find the freedom to truly love. Come, be truly free in me!

Deacon Kelly Edwards