

13TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

1 Kings 19: 16b, 19-21 + Psalm 16 + Galatians 5: 1, 13-18 + Lk. 9: 51-62
5 p.m. Vigil Mass and 8 a.m. Mass, Holy Spirit Catholic Church: June 30, 2019

Today in Luke's Gospel we begin the journey to Jerusalem with Jesus. This section of Luke where Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem is a turning point. This journey will take us from the end of Chapter 9 to Chapter 19 in Luke, stretching into the 1st part of November and covering 19 Sundays in Ordinary Time. Jesus invites us to follow him so that we might be taken up with him into glory, but first we have much to learn and he has much to teach us.

First Jesus casts out the demon of violence from among us, teaching us that there will be no "fire from heaven" to consume those who are hostile to his presence. The first teaching along the road is that hospitality has to replace hostility.

Then there are 3 encounters Jesus has with 3 would-be-followers. These encounters reveal excuses that we can and do use for staying put, excuses for not changing our life to conform more fully to His life.

The first would-be-follower is overconfident, unaware that to truly follow Jesus means being "*homeless*"--- that disciples of Jesus never set down roots in this world. Following Jesus means we are not going to fit in any usual camp. The liberals make no sense and the conservatives make no sense--- only in living the life which Jesus preaches and lives do we find the way home to lasting rest.

The second encounter can be confusing because Jesus comes across as very harsh, "*Let the dead bury their dead.*"

But we have to understand the cultural issue at play, because there is no indication that the father of this would-be-follower is dead. Even though the culture in which this encounter takes place might suggest a son postpone his own life until a father has died, Jesus proposes that sometimes following him may mean going against cultural expectations. In no way does Jesus deny here love and respect for parents. This is about cultural expectations which hinder discipleship, not about family life.

Then the last one comes with conditions which seem reasonable, but following the way of Jesus Christ does not work conditionally.

It is all or nothing.

There can be no distractions and no looking back.

The eyes, the mind, the heart are all focused on one thing only, making the field of this world ready for God's harvest, so dedication and commitment are required.

St. Paul, who dedicates himself completely to the way of Christ Jesus, who commits his entire being to proclaiming the Kingdom of God, shows us what prevents us from being “all in” as disciples of Jesus Christ.

He uses the term “flesh” for those things which lead us away from life with the Lord. We usually think of “flesh” only in terms of sexual sins. but Paul is talking about something much broader and much more deadly. Flesh suggests our inborn self-interested hostility to God, our unhealthy self-reliance and selfishness.

In other words, all those attitudes and actions which enslave us, which prevent us from giving ourselves totally to Jesus and to His Kingdom. If we were to read the rest of Chapter 5, continuing on from where today’s reading ends, we would find Paul mentioning some of these things---idolatry, hatreds, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, envy and others (*Gal. 5: 19-21*).

St. Paul is clear---Christ Jesus has set us free from these “sins of the flesh” that we might live a new life in the Spirit.

When Paul speaks of the “Spirit”, he is referring to our new self in Christ, constituted by the presence of the Holy Spirit and governed by the Spirit’s power and action in us.

The Spirit grants us new abilities, new capacities for relating to the world and to other people.

Once again, if we read a little further along in Chapter 5 of Galatians, Paul describes the outcomes of living in the Spirit and from the Spirit, what he calls the “fruits of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Gal. 5: 22-23*).

All of these fruits of a Spirit-filled life concern love of neighbor, which is the most important part of Paul’s teaching in today’s passage from Galatians. For Paul, the whole law, which would like saying all of religious practice, is fulfilled in one statement: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (*Galatians 5:14*)

Earlier in this same passage, Paul makes clear that Christ Jesus has set us free, not to do whatever we want, but to serve one another through love. We have been given, in Christ, the real meaning of freedom---to generously and joyfully and faithfully love our neighbor.

As Paul focuses on the 2nd half of the one great commandment of Jesus-- to love God with all we are is the first half & to love our neighbor is the 2nd half— takes us right back to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke. Two Sundays from now in this journey with Jesus up to Jerusalem, he will teach us how to put this commandment into practice with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (*Lk 10:25-37*)

To inherit eternal life we must follow the commandment to love God and neighbor, but then the question becomes: “*And who is my neighbor?*” The answer from Jesus is the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which is the framework to what he teaches along the road to Jerusalem. It is this parable which is the key unlocking the heart of discipleship.

In this famous parable, Jesus does not answer the question “*Who is my neighbor*, because he is not going to limit our loving to any one group or class of people. Instead the Good Samaritan shows us what it looks like to “be neighbor” to someone in need, to show mercy to a fellow human being who is hurting.

We are expected to share the merciful love of Jesus with others, and not limit it to only a few. This merciful love is meant to be shared with those we like and those we do not like, with those who are in and those who are out, with those who are legal and those who are illegal. For in the Kingdom of God, all people are equal.

To follow Jesus along the road to Jerusalem means we will be challenged to live and love differently. For either the Gospel changes our mind and heart, or it is not the Gospel. For either the Gospel is good news for the poor, or it is not the Gospel. For either the Gospel changes the world, or it not the Gospel.

Following Jesus on this journey to Jerusalem is the path to life, to fullness of joy in the presence of God, the way to be lifted up with Jesus to the delights at the right hand of the Father forever.

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