

13th Sunday Ordinary C 2022

The readings of today present us with the reality of decision making. God has given us freedom. He has given us freedom to choose. He desires that we choose what is right and good. We are able to choose and decide for ourselves because we are given freedom. Every decision brings with it consequences. In the first reading, Elisha is asked to make a decision, a decision to give up the security of himself and his family and choose the unknown future. Elisha chose the unknown future. He slaughtered the oxen and gave that to people to eat. His answer to God's call was very prompt. In the second reading of today, Paul warns us against false freedom. He reminds us that God's gift of freedom is not a license for us to do what we want. He says, "You are called to freedom brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom an opportunity for the flesh but rather to serve one another through love."

Sometimes the choice that we make in life is seen as something that restricts us or limits our freedom. For example, when you are unmarried, you have many to choose from—you could love so many people. But when you decide to marry, you close all options, and your freedom is limited to one. That is one way of looking at it. But there is another way to look at it—the way of freedom. That is, when you decide to marry, you are freeing yourselves from everybody else to love one person. Your focus becomes that one person. So, it frees you from everybody else so that we can love the other person. You still love others but not in the same way. That is what happens when we decide to follow Christ. It frees us from everything else to focus on Christ. We are all called to follow Christ—some as priests, some as nuns some as hermits, or monks—many as married persons and some as singles. God calls everyone to know him, love him and serve him. Our decision to follow him demands that we need to free ourselves of everything in the world and to focus our attention onto the Lord.

In the gospel, we see that Jesus was resolutely determined to go to Jerusalem. The easiest way to get to Jerusalem from Galilee was through Samaria. But the Samaritans and Jews were hostile to each other because of two reasons: 1) The Samaritans were Jews who got married to the gentiles, so the Jews did not consider them as Jewish; and 2) They worshiped God on Mt. Gerizim, whereas Jews worshiped God in Jerusalem. Since Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, they were not welcome in Samaritan territory. Thus, most Jewish people avoided the Samaritan territory and took the long route to Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy the Samaritans. But Jesus rebuked his disciples and chose another route. When someone has a difference of opinion, we can still be civil.

In the gospel, when the first person expressed his desire to follow Jesus, Jesus reminded him of his poverty. "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." This means, "Have you



counted the cost of following me—the cost of discipleship?" To another person Jesus said, "Follow me." He replied, "Let me first go and bury my father." That means, "I will follow you after my father's death." But Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their dead. You follow me." Burying the dead was a sacred duty in the Old Testament. There is only one person who commands our love more than parents and that is God. So, here Jesus is implicitly revealing himself as God. Another person said, "I will follow you Lord, but first let me go and say farewell to my family at home." To him 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." This reminds us of the first reading where Elisha who was ploughing the field left everything to follow Elijah. It also reminds us of Lot's wife in Genesis 19 who looked back to the sinful city of Sodom. Jesus is calling for a radical detachment.

Nothing should be in the way of us following the Lord. Nothing should stand in the way of discipleship. Nothing should prevent us from serving the Lord. When you are invited to serve in a ministry, what are the responses I hear so often? "I'm working full time." "I'm very busy." "I have young children at home." "I'd love to serve after my children graduate." "We are working full time." "We'd love to serve after retirement." "Now that I am retired, I'm traveling a lot." Nothing should stand in the way of us serving the Lord. Serving the Lord/discipleship should take priority.

What should we do to remain firm in our decision to follow Christ? A few years ago, there was an article in the *Readers' Digest*. It was about a catholic advertising executive. Despite her successful career, she felt an emptiness in her life. One day while she was talking to her marketing consultant, she talked about her emptiness. "Do you want to fill it?" asked the consultant. "Of course, I do," said the executive. "Start each day with an hour of prayer," said the consultant. "You should be kidding. An hour of prayer each day? I am busy from getting up to going to bed—inspection, conference, presentation, training, and so on," said the executive. Then the consultant said, "You are trying to fit God into your life. Instead, you should try to fit your life around God." She went home all confused, but she started doing it the next morning." She later said, "It was not always easy."

God appreciates your struggle. What is important is our commitment. When we feel emptiness in our life, we should consider making a daily commitment to Jesus. Let us not try to fit God into our lives but fit our lives around God.