

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Gospel Word
Luke 9:51–62

Biblical scholars claim that Jesus was fond of using two ways of teaching. Both were easily remembered which is important because he taught in an oral culture. Very few of his words or stories were written during his lifetime. First, he used stories like that of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan. These stories contain rich spiritual truths and a lot of drama. The second way he taught employed what we call one-liners or sound bytes. Today's Gospel reading employs the second method. It uses brief challenging statements.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus calls attention to the radical nature of being a disciple. First, he warns the would-be follower that his life is less secure than that of the wild animals. Then Jesus calls another would-be follower who makes the excuse that he has to first bury his father implying "I have prior obligations." Finally, the third of the would-be disciples wants to just say goodbye. Even Elisha, in the first reading, was able to kiss his father goodbye; Jesus insisted that there was neither time nor emotional space for even that minor diversion from the course. Jesus had set his face for Jerusalem; there was no room to turn around.

Living the Word

We make excuses for all kinds of things we do not want to do.... get out of bed, confront a conflict, go to the gym. Some of them are valid. And some of them are less than truthful. Some of them we make because we really do not want to act, and others we make because we want to postpone something we intend to do. At any given moment in our life, there are options. Some are very self-centered. Some are altruistic. Some could contribute to the Kingdom of God and others may not. Often we know what's best, but we make excuses, and go for the lesser good. Good satisfies us. That's what is going on in these mini-stories in the Gospel. Jesus says, "Come, follow me." One person says he's got to bury a father. Another wants some good-bye time.

When it comes to faith and being a disciple who can help build the Kingdom, where are your priorities? Is the vision of being a disciple part of your life plan? Where does it figure in your list of priorities? Do you ever sit down and figure out what's best for you to do right now? Or are you like the people in the Gospel who seem to be saying, "Yes, I'll follow you Jesus, when it is convenient." In our heart of hearts, each believer is faced with this question. And from today's Gospel reading it appears that God does not seem very interested in excuses.

Think about the image of the person plowing the field. In a word, Jesus is saying not to look back on the work already done. Move forward. Don't get stuck in your history. Keep plowing new ground. Today is a new day filled with new opportunities. Begin anew.

One-line Prayer

Jesus, help us to respond to your invitation to discipleship. Amen.