

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Biblical scholars claim that Jesus was fond of using two ways of teaching. Both were easily remembered and it's good for us to recall that he taught in an oral culture. Very little was written down during his lifetime. First, he used stories like that of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan. These stories contain rich spiritual truth and a lot of drama. The second way he taught employed what we call one-liners. Today's Gospel reading is more like that: brief statements that sound like proverbs or slogans. He also appears to draw upon existing one-liners like when he says that no one plowing a field looks back.

Also in today's Gospel are two of Jesus' responses that might seem anti-family. Both are directed to individuals wanting to follow him. One potential disciple says that he will join Jesus but only after saying good-bye to his family, while the other one mentions that he must first bury his father and then he can follow the Lord. Is Jesus being a bit heartless in saying that both should forget about their families and come with him right away? That seems to be what he's saying, right? Or is it something else? Most of what the Gospels offer are deeper meanings in almost every chapter. No wonder some biblical experts spend their whole lives deciphering just small portions of the Gospels. They are challenging texts to be sure.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Luke 9:51-62

First, let's explore the question of the one who wants to go with Jesus (does he really know Jesus is about to be killed?) and live where he lives. But Jesus does not have a home during his public ministry. He goes where he is invited. Is this what the inquirer wants? It's left as an open question, but the reader is led to think that Jesus lives nowhere (as in a house) but everywhere (as in our hearts). The ways of Jesus are different from what some would suspect. Elsewhere, Jesus notes that our treasure is not something that is stored in a safe place, but rather it is in our hearts. In other words, go deeper to find the truth of Jesus. Today, we might add, Jesus lives in *your* house.

Concerning those who have certain family responsibilities that seem to overrule their following of Jesus, maybe Jesus is saying that there are times when God's invitation to discipleship must be acknowledged first. God's rules come before family rules; family rules are often culturally based. It's a question of priorities. Also, there's an interesting aspect to the matter of burying the father. Suppose he's not dead and may still be around for years. Sons are supposed to bury their fathers. That's the custom. But God's invitation is immediate. We say, "Strike while the iron is hot." There's a certain urgency to God's call. Be open to it, and when you hear it, get moving.

Parent Survival

Let's go back to the image of the one 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. This is good advice to parents. Don't fret about your past mistakes. All parents make them. Learn from them, but don't get stuck on them. Today is a new day filled with new opportunities. Begin anew.

Parents can be hard on themselves because in looking back, they realize that they might have done better. But that's not the way life works. All athletes look back on a particular performance and can think of many different ways that they could have done it better. But that game is over. If a coach sees the athlete brooding, a word will be given about the next game, not the last one. So, good parents, forget the past, forgive themselves for any shortcomings done in the past (we said that a few weeks back) and start anew. Plow ahead in this new day and do your best.

Car or Meal Talk

Discuss why Jesus didn't have a home once he began his public life. A clue is that he seemed more interested in being available to everyone.

One-Line Prayer

God of love, help us to respond to your invitation to do something good as soon as we can. Amen.