

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 30, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Jesus, in today's Gospel you begin your journey to Jerusalem where death awaits you. Give us the courage to follow you and trust you in all things. May your Holy Spirit be with us as we share life and your Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: The words *journey*, *commitment*, and *discipleship* sum up the message of today's readings. In the first reading, Elijah says goodbye to family and former way of life to embark on a new journey of commitment and discipleship to God. In the Gospel, Jesus 'resolutely' sets out on a journey to Jerusalem where he will pay the ultimate price for his fidelity to his Father. Along the way, he tells prospective disciples the 'cost' they will pay for following him. The second reading points to a journey from "living in the flesh" to "living in the spirit."

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 1Kings 19:16, 19-21

This is a story of prophetic succession. It is done not only by *spoken word*, but also by *symbolic action*, i.e., passing of the mantle which represents the handing down of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. Elisha is very willing to respond to his call, but first asks if he can bid farewell to his parents. Elijah's harsh remark is no harsher than Jesus' in today's Gospel. The killing of the oxen is a symbolic action by which Elisha makes a total break from his former life as a farmer. But before Elisha becomes a full-fledged, independent prophet, he must first serve as Elijah's attendant.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 16

The exclusive character of the prophet's love for God fits well with today's responsorial psalm.

SECOND READING: Galatians 5:1, 13-18

Paul speaks about Christian freedom. Through baptism and the grace of Christ, Christians have been freed from the tyranny of the law and from enslavement to sin. But freedom is both a gift and a daily challenge. God graces us with true freedom to serve him in love, but if we do not cooperate with his grace, we will fall back again into the "yoke of slavery."

Christian freedom is not a license to do what we want—especially not a license to follow every urging of the flesh. Rather, Christian freedom calls us to be free to serve others in love. For the Galatians to be "biting and devouring each other" is very contrary to what their baptism and Christian freedom call them to do.

Paul exhorts his readers to live by the spirit and not by the flesh. Paul's intention here is not to set up a false opposition between our physical and spiritual selves. For Paul, the 'flesh' is that part of us which has not yet surrendered to God, the part of us that is inclined towards selfish and sinful ways. The 'spirit,' on the other hand, is that part of us that seeks to follow God's promptings. If we submit to the Holy Spirit, he will help us to resist the inclinations of the flesh and embrace the ways of Jesus.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 9:51-62

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 9:51-62

Jesus begins a journey to Jerusalem where he will face death. As Jesus travels, three prospective disciples tell him that they would like to join him. Instead of expressing happiness, Jesus tells his prospective recruits to think hard about their choice and what it may cost them.

Scholars tell us that Jesus is *not saying what he seems to be saying*, namely, that prospective followers must be ready to adopt a homeless lifestyle, that they should not be preoccupied with burying their dead or maintaining family ties. After all, Jesus' family did have a home in Nazareth. We can also assume that Jesus reverently buried Joseph. Respectful burial of the dead is an important part of Jewish piety (Tobit 4:3). And we can assume that Jesus enjoyed family gatherings. So what is Jesus saying?

Jesus wants to impart to us that prospective disciples must be ready to put him first before family, home, and anything else. Jesus must have first place in the life of a disciple. If, for some reason, a family member tries to get in the way of a disciple's commitment to Jesus, the disciple must opt for Jesus. Allegiance to Christ is even more important than allegiance to one's spouse. Jesus is not dismissing the love and commitment spouses must have for one another but that it should not be above one's allegiance to Christ. To do so would make oneself unfit for the Kingdom of God.

"Attachment to the plow" involves a healthy detachment from everyone and everything. We should never become so attached to a person, job or thing that it threatens our attachment to Jesus. Everyone and everything else must be seen in the context of our first and foremost commitment to Jesus. How will marrying this person impact my relationship with Jesus? Will it help or hurt it? How will taking this job impact my relationship with Jesus? Will it help it or hurt it? Those are the kinds of questions athletes bent on becoming a superstar ask. How will such-and-such a decision impact my number one goal?

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort, challenge, or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In our first reading, we have the "passing of the mantle" of prophetic leadership from Elijah to Elisha. Can you name an experience from your family, work or Church life when this happened to you? What was that experience like for you?

3. "Curbing the cravings of the flesh" can be a big challenge in a society that is so self-indulgent. Is there a craving of the flesh that is a big challenge for you? If so, what helps you to curb this craving?

4. Today, Luke begins what is often called his "journey narrative" (9:51-18:14): Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Can you share an event or time when your life took a new direction. What were the consequences of that choice or new direction?

5. How can or how does your commitment to family sometimes get in the way of your commitment to Jesus and the Church?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Take time to reflect on the journey of your life. Where is it going? Are you peaceful with its present direction? Would you like your life to go in a different direction? If so, name one thing you can do to move in the new direction.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, I want to totally surrender and be committed to you. But sometimes I find it hard to put my love of you, above my love for other people and things. Please grant me the grace to make you and your Word the most important thing in my life.*

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING,
PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

FACILITATOR: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

Pray for new disciples of Christ—that they may have people to teach them by word and example.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord God,
We sometimes put the words,
“I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back”
on our lips.
When I am tempted to turn back,
remind me of the blessings
I have gained by following you, Lord.
Then fill me with an even greater determination
to live under the guidance of your Holy Spirit
each and every day.
Amen.*