

Homily of Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

This Sunday brings us properly to the Ordinary Time of the Church's liturgical calendar after the Easter season, the celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, and the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The Ordinary Time continues to the First Sunday of Advent. From now till the first Sunday of Advent, the Church uses green vestments and green decorations. Green color is the Church's invitation to what St. Paul calls ministry of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:8); that is to grow, bloom and bear fruit with the graces we received from Lenten season to the celebration of Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

The first reading is about the call of Elisha to become a prophet to succeed Prophet Elijah. Elisha accepted the call. In order to answer the call, he freed himself from his former way of life. The reading says, he "took the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for the fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat." After which he proceeded to become Prophet Elijah's disciple. Elisha is just one example of many great men and women who abandoned their former way of life, or ambition, or profession in order to embrace the mission God called them. We have some examples in the Scripture. Abram left his land, his relatives and his father's house to where the mission called him (Genesis 12:1). Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their boat and their father and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22). Many priests, religious, and missionaries have to give up personal ambition in order to answer God's call. Do we feel challenged by the radical 'yes' to God's call of the examples above? We may not abandon our way of life, or ambition, or profession but we can engage in a ministry, or a service or a just cause for God's glory and for the good of humanity.

St. Paul tells us in the second reading that to engage fruitfully in the ministry of the Spirit and to serve one another through love, we must "stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." To be under the yoke of slavery means to be controlled by the desires of the flesh. In Galatians 5:19, St. Paul names some of the desires of the flesh: "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like." We are unable to engage in the ministry of the Spirit or bear meaningful and lasting fruit if we are weighed down by the yoke of the desires of the flesh. We read in the Scripture how Levi (Matthew) the tax collector, left his custom's post and everything and followed Jesus. Saul (Paul), transfigured from a persecutor to the greatest evangelist. Do these radical conversions challenge us? Can we identify yoke of slavery in ourselves and get rid of them?

In the Gospel, Jesus calls our attention, further, to the costs of ministry of the Spirit or cost of discipleship. He says, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nets, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." By these statements, Jesus communicates to us that pleasure and comfort should not be priorities, and there are no rooms for procrastinations and excuses for true disciples. What is needed is radical commitment.

The readings today challenge us to obey the call of God without delay. Like Elisha we are to rid ourselves of the yoke of oxen and plowing equipment (that is personal comfort and worldly gains) that prevent us from the ministry of the Spirit. The readings challenge us to remove the yoke of slavery (that is our sins) that prevent us from properly engaging in the ministry of the Spirit. The readings challenge us to rid ourselves of procrastinations and excuses that prevent us from committing ourselves in the ministry of the Spirit. We are all invited to radical 'yes,' radical conversion, and radical commitment.

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