

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

Second Kings deals mainly with the wars between Judah and Israel and the attacks on them from outside. The situation became even more critical when the Assyrians invaded, first in the 9th century B.C. and more vigorously in the 8th. Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), fell in 721, and later Judah became an Assyrian vassal.

After the assumption of Elijah on Mount Carmel (2 Kings 2:11) Elisha the prophet takes over the role of promoting the covenant.

Our reading today is the second of a complex of ten stories about Elisha. These stories alternate between the prophet's dealings with his own people and his interactions with Gentiles. Each of the stories evidences such hallmarks of "legend" as the tendency to avoid naming characters (other than Elisha himself) and the intention of evoking wonderment at the hero's powers. I am inclined to believe that the stories are not legends in the sense that they are not real, but in fact are true depictions of events in Elisha's life. After all, he was a prophet of God Most High and what he did in God's name would in fact evoke wonderment in the eyes of those who came in contact with him. I am reminded of a statement in Peter Kreeft's book *The God Who Loves You*: "Prophets are like fingers, not faces. We are not meant to look at them but to the reality to which they point."

⁸ One day Elisha came to Shunem,

Shunem is located about 30 miles northeast of Samaria.

where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her. Afterward, whenever he passed by, he used to stop there to dine. ⁹ So she said to her husband, "I know that he is a holy man of God. Since he visits us often, ¹⁰ let us arrange a little room on the roof and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp, so that when he comes to us he can stay there." ¹¹ Sometime later Elisha arrived and stayed in the room overnight. ¹⁴ Later Elisha asked, "Can something be done for her?" "Yes!" Gehazi answered. "She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years."

It was regarded as failure if no son was produced to inherit the estate. Gehazi, a name which means "valley of vision," was Elisha's servant.

¹⁵ "Call her," said Elisha. When she had been called, and stood at the door, ¹⁶ Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son."

Although our reading doesn't mention it, she doubted Elisha but by the same time the following year she had a son.

2nd Reading - Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Last week in our second reading we discussed three ages: Adam to Moses which is the natural period represented by the fallen, unhappy family; Moses to Christ which is the legal period in which one nation is the example; and from Christ onward which is the period of international blessing where all nations are blessed and freed from the Law through the grace of Christ.

From Adam to Moses, the source of "death" was Adam's sin. Human beings did, of course, commit evil, but they were not charged with it (sin is not taken into account where there is no Law). From Moses to Christ, the Law was added and human sin was understood as a transgression of it so now, in addition to Adam's sin, individual transgressions are also taken into account because the Law existed. In the third period, that of Christ, there is freedom from the Law through the grace of Christ. This third period is described more fully beginning in Romans 10:4. In our reading today, Saint Paul describes the new life, the life in Christ, which we receive in baptism. To better understand the context, we will begin to read in Romans 5:20 and proceed through 6:14 but confine our study to the reading itself.

²⁰ The law entered in so that transgression might increase but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ^{6:1} What then shall we say? Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not! ² How can we who died to sin yet live in it? ³ Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Roman Christians, instructed in the apostolic catechesis, should be well aware of the effects of baptism. The rite of Christian initiation does not merely identify the Christian with the dying Christ who has won victory over sin, but introduces him into the very act by which that victory was won.

"Paul says this so that we might know that once we have been baptized we should no longer sin, since when we are baptized we die with Christ. This is what it means to be baptized into His death. For there all our sins die, so that, renewed by the death we have cast off, we might be seen to rise as those who have been born again to new life, so that just as Christ died to sin and rose again, so through baptism we might also have the hope of resurrection. Therefore, baptism is the death of sin so that a new birth might follow, which, although the body remains, nevertheless renews us in our soul and buries all our old evil deeds." [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles* Romans 6:3]

⁴ We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,

The baptismal rite represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; the convert experiences this by descending into the baptismal pool, being submerged, and emerging to a new life which is symbolized by the white garment.

so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

The efficiency of the resurrection is ascribed to the Father who gives life to the dead (Romans 4:17).

we too might live in newness of life.

Baptism brings about an identification of the Christian with the glorified Christ, enabling him or her to live actually with the life of Christ Himself; a new creation is involved.

⁵ For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. ⁷ For a dead person has been absolved from sin. ⁸ If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

The new life of the Christian is not the object of sensible perception or immediate consciousness; it is perceived only with the eyes of faith.

⁹ We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.

The resurrection of Christ has brought the Christian into the age of glory, freed from the wages of death and sin. Christ was raised from the dead not merely to publicize His good news or to confirm His messianic character, but to introduce human beings into a new mode of life and give them a new principle of vital activity, the Holy Spirit.

“Paul is saying that if Christ had died for sinners two or three times, there would be no danger in going back to our old sinful ways. But as He only died once, we who have been buried and risen again with him will not die to sin again. There will be no second baptism, no second death of Christ. Therefore we must be careful to stay alive.” [Diodore of Tarsus (ca. A.D. 373), *Pauline Commentary From the Greek Church*]

¹⁰ As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God.

His death was a unique event, never to be repeated. Through it He entered into His glory where time has no dominion. He is continually offering Himself to the Father in our behalf (Revelation 5:6) so that all generations are freed.

11 Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as (being) dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian was united with Christ at baptism and must now live the life of Christ because sin causes a rupture in that union.

12 Therefore, sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. 13 And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. 14 For sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace.

Gospel - Matthew 10:37-42

Two weeks ago we heard Jesus commission the twelve apostles and last week we heard some of His instructions to them. This week we hear the conclusion of His instructions.

37 “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,

Luke 14:26 says “hate” father and mother; these words here soften that understanding for us. Luke actually says the same thing as Matthew. Aramaic had no other way of saying “love less” than “hate” and one writing from that perspective would use those words. The word of God in fact leads to these divisions mentioned here. It can lead, even within families, to those who embrace the faith being regarded as enemies by relatives who resist the word of truth. These words do not set up any opposition between the first and fourth commandments; they simply indicate the order of priorities.

and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

This is the first time Matthew uses the word “cross.” Other allusions to the passion are found in this gospel before Matthew predicts it openly. Crucifixion was a method of execution of Oriental origin which the Romans adopted and perfected for rebels and slaves. Roman law prohibited its use on a Roman citizen. The use of the cross as a Christian symbol makes it difficult for the reader to grasp the harshness of this saying when it was initially uttered. The personal renunciation implied will go far beyond renunciation of one’s family.

39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

40 “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

This explains the nature of the apostolic office using the legal principle governing a Jewish emissary: “A man’s agent is like himself.” It deepens the religious basis of the apostolate by deriving it ultimately from God the Father Himself.

41 Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward,

A prophet's mission is not essentially one of announcing future events; his main role is that of communicating the word of God as he monitors the status of the covenant relationship of the people with God. Prophets were mistreated on earth but rewarded in heaven for their loyalty to God.

and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward.

The very fact of generously receiving God's friends will gain one the reward that they obtain.

42 And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”

Even those who give a glass of cold water – an alms, or any other small service – will receive a reward because he has shown generosity to our Lord Himself (Matthew 25:40).