

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

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 - 1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21

The first book of Kings covers the reign of King Solomon, who built the first Temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, through the division of the kingdom and the reigns of Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahaziah of Israel (971 B.C. through 853 B.C.). The first book of Kings contains a lot of important theological material but it is also historically very accurate, as recent archaeology has shown.

To understand God's message in Kings we need to keep in mind the teaching of the book of Deuteronomy. The basic teaching of Deuteronomy has to do with there being only one God and one valid Temple for His worship. This centralization of priesthood and liturgy is first legislated in Deuteronomy 12.

In Kings, the kings are condemned because instead of concentrating on the Temple in Jerusalem they establish rival shrines at Bethel and Dan in the north in opposition to the Temple; furthermore, they are neglectful of their duty to suppress the "high places" all over Palestine where sacrifice is offered to Baal in contravention of the covenant.

Today's reading is about the Prophet Elijah who lived during the reign of King Ahab of Israel (the northern kingdom). Elijah (the name means "my God is Yahweh"), like all God's prophets, pronounces things which people don't want to hear. Baal worship has become commonplace and Elijah has come to Ahab and predicted three years of drought (1 Kings 17:1). When the drought occurs, Elijah has to flee. After three years pass, Elijah confronts Ahab through Ahab's servant Obadiah (1 Kings 18:1-17) and challenges Ahab to an ordeal with the prophets of Baal to see whether Baal or Yahweh will bring rain. The ordeal takes place on Mount Carmel; the prophets of Baal appeal by ritual dance and ecstasy. Elijah's appeal to Yahweh is answered when his sacrifice is consumed by a bolt of lightning and rain comes from the sea (1 Kings 18:18-46). All is not well though and Elijah is forced to flee from the kingdom by the hostility of Jezebel, who is Ahab's wife and has fostered the worship of the Canaanite Baal in Israel. Elijah goes to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai), where Yahweh appears to him not in the earthquake or the wind or the lightning, but in a gentle whisper, and tells him to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to be his successor (1 Kings 19:1-18).

16b [You shall anoint] Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, as prophet to succeed you. ¹⁹ Elijah set out, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth.

The number of oxen indicates he was from a well-to-do family. The number twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, and the number of governmental perfection.

Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him.

The cloak symbolizes the rights of the owner (Ruth 3:9). Since the hair shirt cloak of the prophet was part of their official dress (2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4), casting it upon another would indicate an investiture and initiation.

²⁰ Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you." "Go back!" Elijah answered. "Have I done anything to you?" ²¹ Elisha left him and, taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat. Then he [Elisha] left and followed Elijah as his attendant.

The sacrificial meal on the spot, shared by his neighbors and accompanied by the destruction of his farming equipment, signifies Elisha's renunciation of his previous life for his new vocation as Elijah's disciple.

2nd Reading - Galatians 5:1, 3-18

During the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C) we hear that when we were baptized, we became part of the Body of Christ and therefore inheritors of all that was promised to Abraham. Today we continue with Paul's answers to the Judaizers.

5:1 For freedom Christ set us free;

This sums up the doctrinal section of the letter: we don't have license to deviate from the Law, but freedom from the Law, and its material observances.

so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

Those under the old covenant were slaves of God, those under the new covenant are God's children (Romans 8:15).

"He adds 'again,' not because the Galatians had previously kept the law ... but in their readiness to observe the lunar seasons, to be circumcised in the flesh and to offer sacrifices, they were in a sense returning to the cults that they had previously served in a state of idolatry." [Saint Jerome (A.D. 386), *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Galatians* 2,5,1]

¹³ For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.

If the Law is done away with, Christians may not abandon themselves to earthly, material, Godless conduct. Their freedom must rather be one of service of love, a freedom for others.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

See Leviticus 19:18. Neither here nor in Romans 13:8-10 does Paul include the love of God. In Leviticus, the “neighbor” is a fellow Israelite; for Paul “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (Romans 10:12).

“What need is there for the holy apostle to make use of the new law, if the new covenant is foreign to the old legislation? He wants to show both covenants are from the one Lord. They are best perceived as sharing the same intent. The fulfillment of the Law is through the love of one’s neighbor, because love is that which effects the perfect good. He therefore says that love is the fulfilling of the Law.” [Saint Epiphanius of Salamis (A.D. 374-377), *Panacea Against All Heresies* 42,12,3]

15 But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. 16 I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.

Let the Holy Spirit guide your conduct. The Spirit, as the principle of Christian sonship, is also the principle of Christian activity (see v18; Romans 8:14).

17 For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.

The Christian in union with Christ and endowed with the Spirit still struggles with the “flesh,” the symbol of all human opposition to God (see Romans 7:15-23). The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

18 But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Under the influence of the indwelling Spirit, the Christian has an interior principle to counteract the “flesh” and is no longer merely confronted with the extrinsic norm of the Law.

“He did not say ‘Walk in the Spirit so that you will not have desires of the flesh’ but ‘so you will not gratify them.’ Not to have them at all, indeed, is not the struggle but the prize of the struggle, if we shall have obtained the victory by perseverance under grace. For it is only the transformation of the body into an immortal state that will no longer have desires of the flesh.” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (ca. A.D. 394), *Explanation of the Epistle to the Galatians* 47]

Gospel - Luke 9:51:62

In last week's gospel reading we heard Peter proclaim that Jesus is "The Messiah of God." Jesus then forbade His disciples to tell anyone of this and proceeded to begin teaching them of His coming passion and the fact that those who are His followers must take up their cross daily and follow in Christ's footsteps. Today we learn more about discipleship.

In the interim between last week's reading (12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C) and today's, the transfiguration has taken place. The Lord comes to transform our lives. If we accept new life, we must be prepared to move with the Lord and leave the security of where we have been. There can be no looking back. Those of us who are raised in the Christian faith often take our relationship with Christ for granted. We fail to recognize the radical nature of our call. We need to look to those who have felt a conversion or call to Christ.

⁵¹ When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined

"He resolutely determined" is, literally, "he set his face." Indicates Jesus' obedient resoluteness to fulfill God's will despite all opposition.

to journey to Jerusalem,

The city that symbolizes the continuity between the old and the new covenants in God's plan. In Jerusalem, Jesus will complete His exodus to God, and from Jerusalem the Christian mission will travel to the ends of the earth.

⁵² and he sent messengers ahead of him. On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, ⁵³ but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem.

Samaritans were not friendly to Jews, especially when the Jews were passing through their territory on the way to the holy city, Jerusalem. To the Jews, the Samaritans were a heretical and schismatic group of spurious worshipers of the God of Israel, who were detested even more than pagans. The Samaritans had been rudely rebuffed when the Temple was being rebuilt in the time of Zechariah and the schism became complete when the Samaritans built a temple to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim.

⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?"

The wording of this verse echoes that of 2 Kings 1:10,12 which narrates how Elijah twice called down fire to destroy his enemies.

⁵⁵ Jesus turned and rebuked them,

Jesus lives out in deed His teaching about non-retaliation against enemies (see Luke 6:27-29,35).

⁵⁶ and they journeyed to another village.

Possibly also a Samaritan village.

⁵⁷ As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ Jesus answered him, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.”

Jesus doesn't trick anyone into following Him; He wants total dedication.

⁵⁹ And to another he said, “Follow me.” But he replied, “(Lord,) let me go first and bury my father.”

Filial piety, especially in burying one's parents, is deep within Judaism. There is no indication that the father is deceased (or even ill). The man wants to join the journey to salvation on his own terms.

⁶⁰ But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. Jesus offers everlasting life.

⁶¹ And another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.” ⁶² (To him) Jesus said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus demands more than Elisha in the 1st reading; ploughing for the kingdom entails sacrifice; one cannot look back, lest the work suffer.