

HOMILY for 13th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel & First Reading tell us about the importance of doing acts of kindness and receiving their rewards from the Lord. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story to share with you.

Three brothers left home, started careers, & prospered. During a dinner together, they discussed the gift they were giving their mother for her seventy-fifth birthday.

The first brother commented, "I built a big house for Mom."

The second said, "I sent her an expensive car with a driver."

The third brother reported, "You remember how Mom enjoys reading the Bible? Well, since she doesn't see so well anymore, I sent her a remarkable parrot that can recite the Scripture. It took the elders in the church twelve years to teach it the whole Bible. Mom just has to name the Book, Chapter, & Verses; & the parrot will say it."

Soon the woman sent letters of thanks to her sons. To the first she penned, "The house you built me is nice; but way too big for an old woman like me. I live in just one room, but I still have to clean the whole place."

To the second she wrote, "The car is beautiful, I really don't enjoy traveling anymore. Besides, that driver drives way too fast!"

Finally, she wrote to the third, "Thank you so much, son, for your wonderful gift. That little chicken you sent was quite delicious!"

Anyway, some people assume that their lives would be much easier if they would follow Jesus. They think that their journey of faith would be like a walk in a park. They feel that Jesus would do all sorts of miracles & make their crosses disappear for them. That is why Peter reacted negatively when Jesus told His disciples that He would have to suffer & be hung on the Cross for the salvation of the world. Then, Peter responded, "God forbid, Lord. None of that would happen to you [Master]." Jesus was so mad at Peter that He replied, "Get behind me, Satan. You think like humans do, not like God does." But, the journey to Heaven & the road of discipleship with Jesus is one of the cross. Jesus went through with it in spite of the public's expectation for a political Messiah who would lead the Israelites on a revolution against the Roman occupiers. Jesus sure did not turn away or reject the journey of the cross in any way. Rather, He embraced it & set a good example for us & all His future disciples.

Jesus was so sure & confident about the journey of the cross that He said the following in this Sunday's Gospel, "Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me. He who will not take up his cross & come after me is not worthy of me. He who seeks only himself brings himself to ruin, whereas he who loses his life for my sake will find it." Jesus basically told His disciples that anyone who dares to follow Him has to take up one's cross. Anyone who wants to be called a Christian/Catholic must walk the journey of the cross. That is why He requires us to leave behind everything, including our loved ones to take on that journey & complete it. Otherwise, we will be concerned & distracted by those things. I do not know about you, but some people were taken back when they have heard that they could not love their families more than Jesus. Conventional wisdom might tell us that we must put our families above Jesus. But, today Jesus makes it clear that we cannot put our families, friends, & other worldly things before Him & then expect to make it through the entire journey of the cross to the end. For other priorities of our lives would take over & leave us wondering why we

would continue the journey of the cross. On the other hand, if we put Jesus above everything else & let Him lead us through the journey of the cross, we will have a better chance to complete it & receive an abundant reward in the end.

Many people do not like the journey of the cross because it demands resilience & sacrifices. However, humans are not good at either one of those. They are impatient & do not like to make any sacrifices for greater good. In case we need an example to encourage us to make sacrifices & stay resilient on the journey of the cross, this Sunday's First Reading tells us this amazing story, "One day Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her... So, she said to her husband, 'I know that he is a holy man of God. Since he visits us often, let us arrange a little room on the roof & furnish it for him... so that when he comes to us he can stay there.' Sometime later Elisha arrived & stayed in the room overnight... Later Elisha asked, 'Can something be done for her?'... When she had been called & stood at the door, Elisha promised, 'This time next year you will be fondling a baby son.'" So, because the woman of influence in Shunem was kind & generous in her treatment of Prophet Elisha, the Lord repaid her & blessed her & her husband with a baby boy in their old age. Clearly her kindness & sacrifice did not go unnoticed. The Lord repaid & rewarded her for it.

Time & time again, we have learned in the Bible & our Christian/Catholic tradition how the Lord repaid abundantly all the acts of kindness & sacrifice. Those extraordinary acts are what distinguishes the people of God from the rest of the world. Jesus & the early Church did lots of those acts in their daily lives & attracted new members that way as well. Unfortunately, we live in a time that people would not want to share God's blessings for them with the poor & the misfortunate. Instead, they have rallied to the idea of "Me first & the heck with the immigrants & the social outcast;" & yet they have felt no shame about it. They love to identify themselves Christians/Catholics; but they have refused to do any acts of kindness & sacrifice to demonstrate it. If we want to follow Jesus & do not act like Him in our kind & virtuous way of life, what difference is it between us and the world? In case we need to hear from Jesus about following a life of kindness & virtues, He has this message for us in today's Gospel, "...I promise you that whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, the person will surely not lose one's reward."

My dear brothers & sisters, no one likes to walk the journey of the cross. But, Jesus did it to show us an example & bring us salvation. No one wants to do acts of kindness & make sacrifices for greater good these days. But, Jesus did it all His life & has encouraged us to do the same. If we call ourselves Christians/Catholics, we must do the same & practice it every day. For Jesus promised us the reward when we give someone just a cup of cold water.