



13th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Date: Sunday, July 2, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: 2 Kings 4:8–11, 14–16a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:2–3, 16–19 | **Response:** Psalm 89:2a

Second Reading: Romans 6:3–4, 8–11

Gospel Acclamation: 1 Peter 2:9

Gospel Reading: Matthew 10:37–42

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

As I read today's readings I was struck by one of the many qualities of God, his loving kindness, and the hospitality and love Jesus is calling us to.

In today's Gospel though, at least on a first reading of it, you might be forgiven for wondering where is the kindness in this text? After all it follows just after Jesus has said: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." He continues to say "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Much could be said here about the problems of nepotism and tribalism – and with the ANC conference on this weekend, I'm sure many people are worried about the blatant nepotism and corruption in our country.

But I think the point here is that we must be loyal to Jesus, we must always show him our love, in other words, we must show Jesus our allegiance, which is above everything and everyone. But this allegiance, this love, is shown, as St Ignatius says, more in deeds than in words.

Jesus then says "he who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" and that is what we see in our first reading from the 2nd book of Kings.

There we hear the story of Elisha and the woman from Shunem. What strikes me most about this story is the women's hospitality and kindness. It is her actions that speak volumes. She saw Elisha the prophet pass past her home and she

wanted to offer him hospitality. She wanted to receive the prophet – which ultimately means, wanting to receive the Good News the prophet will bring. Not content with just accommodating him, she builds a room, and furnishes it with a bed, table, and lamp. In return Elisha foretells that she will bear a son. This is good news indeed. Good news, in response to her radical gestures.

In Elisha and the women from Shunem we see radical gratitude and hospitality on display.

With all that's going on in the world today, how we treat strangers and foreigners, and anyone different to us, or not part of our 'group', this woman from Shunam's witness to the power of invitation, welcome, and hospitality forces us to consider how our actions are in keeping with our own commitment to love Jesus.

The first reading and the Gospel ask us then, to consider the quality of the love we owe Jesus. If it is just words and not backed up by deeds, to those who are made in God's image and are placed in our daily lives for us to interact and demonstrate that love, then I fear our love is like the clanging gongs and clashing of symbols... noise without substance. We can come to Mass and say our prayers, but if we do not become radically more hospitable, more open, more welcoming, more loving and more kind, then we have not understood Jesus's Good News.

St Paul in the second reading asks us to consider something too. He speaks of the great change we have undergone in baptism.

I suppose for many of us who come to Mass week after week, we may have lost the fervor that a newly baptized person has. Gradually our lives become more mundane; we have other concerns and the radical change that Baptism once meant for us might have faded. In the second reading Paul is reminding us that we are actually different people to those who are not baptized in Christ. Sin had a power over us that it no longer does now that we are baptized. This means we can actually love in a radical way. We can actually do the things that the woman in the first reading, or even Jesus in the Gospel is proposing. Because Jesus has made it possible and we have received the grace to do so when we were baptized.

Paul ends the second reading by saying that we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. But this is a different form of consideration to that I proposed earlier in seeing how we love Jesus concretely through our actions. In the Greek, St Paul's original meaning of 'consideration' has more to do with calculation and counting than it does with reflection and thought. So why has Paul chosen to use an accounting metaphor here.

In one sense, when one calculates an answer to a mathematical problem, we get to an answer that did not exist before. But in another sense all that the calculation does is to make you aware of what in fact was true all along. In other words, it doesn't create a new reality. It merely expresses the reality in a different way. Like an equation, both the question and the answer are the same. Until one adds up the money in the till, one does not know how much the day's takings were worth. But adding it up doesn't make the day's takings a cent larger or smaller than they already are.

So in considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, in calculating this reality, St Paul is reminding us that we have been given a grace and a duty to love Jesus, and this entails being loving, kind and hospitable to others. And that this is not something we have to wait for, but it is something already present in us.

Quite often we might think we need to be more holy, even more holy than we already are, in order to do good, to show love. But St Paul is reminding us rather forcefully that we are already holy because we have been baptized.

Let's give thanks to God for the grace of our baptism. Let's remember what that baptism did for us, and continues to do for us today as we are empowered to love Jesus, in a special way by loving those we encounter each day. As our psalm proclaims today:

Blessed are the people ... who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance.

Let us be conscious of God's light, God's grace in our lives. Let us always try to welcome the stranger, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to help the poor, to be hospitable, to be loving, to be kind. Because these are the ways we show our allegiance to Jesus. These are the ways we show our love. These are the deeds that make our love real.

Amen.

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