

13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C  
REALITIES OF DISCIPLESHIP

*“Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk. 9: 62).*

One of the critical issues of our time is the gale or tsunami of information that smashes on our faces from various media and gadgets. This is a healthy human development because, it has contributed in astronomical dimensions to the growth of human knowledge and facilitated human relationships at all levels. However, we can only realise these advantages when we have been able to manage this influx and master it to serve us, and not distract, confuse, and mislead us. This situation calls for understanding of the realities before us and properly interpreting the “signs of the time” to enable us to make right decisions and be resolute in our commitments to matters of higher values. In today’s Readings the Word of God reminds us of these challenges with the lived experience of Elisha in the First Reading (1 Kgs. 19: 16, 19-21), who having been called by Elijah, as directed by God, offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving, bade farewell to his servants and “followed Elijah and became his servant.” St. Paul, in the Second Reading (Gal. 5: 1, 13-18), warns us against the danger of liberty (one of the over-exaggerated issues of today’s world) and exhorts us not to allow its tendencies to the things of the flesh get in the way of our choices of the things of the Spirit. Fulton Sheen also cautions it: “Freedom does not mean that right to do whatever we please, but to do as we ought. The right to do whatever we please reduce freedom to a physical power and forgets that freedom is a moral power.” In the Gospel (Lk. 9: 51 -62), Jesus demonstrates His commitment to the will of the Father and teaches us what it means to be a true disciple. Let us sift the core messages from a couple of incidents in the gospel.

***The Journey to Jerusalem:*** In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus went to Jerusalem only once. The journey begins from Luke 9: 51, where our Gospel begins. “As the time drew near for Him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” The journey was for a purpose. Jesus knew what was awaiting Him in Jerusalem and He was determined to go: “For I came from heaven not to do My own will but to do the will of the One who sent Me” (Jn. 6: 38). It was a journey of obedience, love, and grace. He was resolute, focused and refused to be distracted. Not even by the rejection of the Samaritans, whose town He was to pass through. It is striking to note that this journey, which began with rejection by the Samaritans would be accomplished by His rejection by His own people.

Thus, the initial rejection was a foreshadow of the rejection that was imminent. Jesus understood the reason for the Samaritan's bluff. As St. Luke points out it was because He was "on His way to Jerusalem." The Samaritans were Jews of mixed descent and therefore, were not considered as Jews by the others. In fact, they were treated with scorn and not allowed to mix and relate with others. Remember the question the Samaritan woman by the well put to Jesus: "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman, why are you asking me for water? (Jn. 4: 9). Jesus confronted the racial and ethnic discrimination between the Jews and the Samaritans with love and acceptance. That is why He opted for a more humane response when the "Sons of Thunder", James and John, suggested a rain of fire on the Samaritans as a punishment for their act of rejection of their Master. The lesson here is that we must learn to forgive and to love, even our enemies. St. Augustine said: "if you had treated me as an enemy when I was your enemy, how could I ever call you my friend?" Jesus teaches us that we destroy our enemies by making them our friends.

***The Realities of Discipleship:*** "As they travelled along," St. Luke tells us, they met three men. The first expressed the desire to follow Jesus: "I will follow you wherever you go" he said. Jesus answered: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk. 9: 57-58). Some scholars opine that this was in reference to the fact that He will be buried in a borrowed tomb. Nevertheless, Jesus was pointing to the reality of being His follower: that it was not a mission of material comfort and coziness; that it was an enterprise laden with sacrifice and self-denial. This affirms Jesus' words earlier: "Whoever wants to be a follower of mine, must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Lk. 9: 23. Matt. 16: 24; Mk. 8: 34). We are not told how the man responded or reacted to this. Therefore, the question is: what would you do? How are we responding to this invitation daily? To the second man, Jesus directly invited him: "Follow Me." The man answered, "Let me go and bury my father first." To this, Jesus responded: "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9: 59-60). To be a follower of Jesus, one must be detached from family ties so that it does not constitute a barrier or interfere unduly with the duties of service. In Matthew 10: 37, Jesus states it unequivocally: "Whoever loves his father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; whoever loves his son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me." The third man's excuse is reflected family ties; "I will follow you, Sir, but first let me go and say goodbye to my people at home." To this Jesus answered: "Once the hand is laid on the

plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk. 9: 61-62). God’s call demands a total and unalloyed response. Unlike Elisha in the first Reading, the man in the gospel does not seem to be fully aware of the import of discipleship, which implies severance of family ties, abandonment of other professions to focus on the demands of the mission. These detachments may seem cruel, but they are necessary if the work of the kingdom is to be carried out in earnest. They set the disciple free to be all things to all men; to consider every family his family, every home his home, every land his land. It opens him to welcoming and receiving all men and all peoples from every tribe and nation to bring them to Christ.

***My dear friends,*** the Church gives us the privilege to accompany Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem. To us too, Jesus says: “Follow Me.” Discipleship today means that we are called to be Jesus mouth and voice that speaks for the voiceless and the oppressed; we are called to be His eyes that sees the sufferings and pains of the weak in our society; we are called to be His feet that walks the earth spreading the good news to its ends; we are called to be His heart that judges with love and mercy. How are we responding to this call?