

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(1 Kings 19:16.19-21 / Luke 9:51-62)  
26.06.2016  
Following Christ

Dear brothers and sisters,

Both readings heard this morning remind us that we are called to follow Christ. It is Christ who took the initiative: He invited us to follow Him. In answer to his invitation, one day, we freely chose to offer our life to Him and took the path of discipleship. To follow Christ means something different for each one of us, in accord with each one's state of life. To give our heart to the Lord, to offer our whole life to Him on a special day is one thing. To remain faithful to our offering each and every day of our life is something else. From experience, we know how difficult it is for us to persevere and remain faithful to our promises day in and day out. The gospel passage we have just heard offers some precious insights for those who try to follow Christ.

In today's gospel, we see Jesus "resolutely taking the road to Jerusalem" to suffer his passion, by which he will set free humankind from sin and death. Jesus walks with his disciples who want to call down fire from heaven to burn a Samaritan village which refuses to receive Jesus. Jesus rebukes his disciples and refuses the fire from heaven. Jesus does not agree with the use of **violence**. He is going to Jerusalem not to impose Himself or enforce anything, but to lay down his life and in so doing to defeat violence. For Jesus what matters is to remain faithful to the mission confided to him by his Father: What counts for Christ is to reveal the Father's love for all human being without exception, whatever cost this may entail for Him. Instead of responding to violence with violence, Jesus responds to violence with love, mercy and forgiveness. He offers his life out of love for his Father and all of us, including those who are violent toward him. In this way, Jesus disarms violence; He dissolves its power; He breaks its cycle. He is victorious over violence. Violence will kill Him, but He will rise from the dead and live for ever.

All use of violence in the name of Jesus, God or religion is a kind of fanaticism, something which is becoming more and more prevalent today in different contexts, but which is nonetheless and always wrong. Fundamentally, the way of fanaticism is dishonest: In being violent, we serve ourselves, our own interests, our ideologies, and not God who is love and mercy. By being extremist we follow ourselves and not the Lord.

If we want to follow Jesus, we have to renounce the use of violence as He himself did. Just before his passion, Jesus gives us an example. When He was arrested, one of his followers grasped his sword and struck out at the High Priest's servant and cut off his ear. Jesus said to him: "Put your sword back; for all who draw the sword will die by the sword".

Let us come back to our gospel passage. Herein we have three little stories which throw light upon the freedom which is required of us, if we want to follow Christ.

The first man says to Jesus: "I will follow you wherever you go". He wants to follow Christ thinking that He is going somewhere on earth, that there is a place somewhere where he will rest. The first man thinks that one day he will be able to sit down and say: That's it; I have arrived! But Jesus is The Way. He pursues a journey; He is one who is passing through; He passes on His

way until the day He passes from this world to the Father. There is no place where Jesus can settle. Consequently, we who follow Him cannot content ourselves to settle into this world's way. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to espouse the spirituality of the Exodus: We must walk, journey, pursue the way. We shall have arrived at our destiny and be able to rest only after our death, not before. We have to consent to walk unceasingly the path from a self-centred life to a Christ-centred life, a life centred on the real needs of our neighbour. The people of Israel were on the move in the desert for forty years, that is to say the average span of a human life at that period in time. So we can say that 'to be on the move' is of the essence of our life. We are a pilgrim people; our true homeland is in heaven. There, and only there, shall we enjoy rest for ever, not before. For the moment, we have to pursue our journey taking a path made of good works and prayer. Fidelity to our times of prayer is what permits to endure on the path of good works...

The story of the second man is a kind of parable: "Another to whom Jesus said 'follow me' replied 'let me go and bury my father first'. But Jesus answered: 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God'. First, it is important to underline that Jesus does not forbid filial love. That would be in contradiction with the Decalogue: "Honour your father and mother", and with Jesus' teaching on the love of neighbour. The point that Jesus is making is that his followers have not to give death power over them. They must be set free from death and the fear of death. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of life and not a kingdom of death. Here too, the followers of Jesus have to pass from death to life. They are not to worry about burying the dead, but they have to preach the victory of life over death. To bury the dead? Yes! But in the light of eternal life!

The story of the third man is in the same perspective as the previous one. He says: "I will follow you, but first let me go and say good bye to my people at home". This story is not about a refusal or a condemnation of family relationships. It is about being set free from our past; it is about not being a slave of our past any longer. We have to be ready to welcome the novelty of the kingdom of God which is coming. The kingdom comes when the bell or the phone rings, when an unexpected guest appears. We have to be always ready to welcome the God of surprises! This is a theological truth which has to find place in our psychology! This will happen with God's grace, and with our perseverance and good will. To follow Christ is to live in 'the present moment' where the Lord lives and awaits our welcome. To live in the present moment can be crucifying, but it is the path of life, the way to life. Christ is in the present moment. He is always present to us.

May the Lord renew our desire to follow Him! May He set us free from all that hinders us from following Him!