

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

JUNE 28, 2020

13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

SCRIPTURES:

2 Kings 4:8-11; 14-16	Elisha encounters the Shunammite woman.
Ps 89: 2-3;16-17; 18-19	What has happened to the Lord's promises of old?
Romans 6:3-4; 8-11	Through baptism, Christ's death becomes our own.
Matthew 10:37-42	Jesus must be our top priority.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

2 Kings

Our first reading consists of a few verses taken from the story of the first encounter between the prophet Elisha and the Shunammite woman. It parallels the story of the encounter of the prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, yet has some interesting differences. In that story, Elijah meets the widow during a great famine. She is about to prepare one last meal with the little bit of food she has left for herself and her son. Elijah calls on her to trust God by making Elijah a cake as well. As a result of her faith, she, her son and Elijah have food to eat during the famine. However, the widow's son becomes ill and dies. The widow, whose faith is tested, asks Elijah if he has come to expose her guilt. Elijah prays, and the boy is restored to life.

The Shunammite woman, on the other hand, is described as "a woman of influence." There is no famine in the land, and she is relatively wealthy. She welcomes Elisha into her home and prepares for him a room where he can stay whenever he is in the area. Elisha, seeking to bless the woman for her hospitality, asks her if he can do anything for her. She replies that she has her extended family and therefore needs nothing more from Elisha or, by extension, from God. Elisha persists, and seeing that she is childless, tells her that she will have a son. Years later, the son becomes very ill and dies. The woman's faith is tested, but she sends for Elisha. Elisha prays, and the son is restored to life.

Psalm 89

This psalm is an appropriate reflection on our first reading. It reflects the point of view of an unnamed king who is a descendant of David. It begins as a great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for all that God has done for Israel, particularly in making a covenant with Israel and then with King David and David's descendants. God promises to never forsake David's dynasty. Then the psalm becomes lamentation. This king is encountering defeat, disaster, insult and shame. He wonders where God's promises have gone. Yet, he ends his psalm with an expression of praise: "Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen, amen!" He keeps faith that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, God will fulfill His promises.

Romans

In this section of Romans, Paul has been developing a theology of sin and salvation. All of humanity, he insists, has become captives of sin. But where sin has abounded, the grace of God in Christ Jesus has all the more abounded, and has overcome sin. Here, Paul begins to deal with an objection born from humanity's seemingly infinite talent for self-justification. If sin has made grace abound, some asked, then why not sin all the more so that grace would be even more available to us? (Romans 6:1) Paul argues that this question is logically flawed because it contains a gross misunderstanding of how God has overcome sin in Christ and of how people share in that victory. Christ's death has broken the power of sin; his resurrection has broken the power of death. Through baptism, we participate in Christ's death. Christ's victory over sin becomes our own. This means that, through baptism, we Christians have truly died to sin and, therefore, are no longer under its power. Thus, we are given the grace to not merely avoid sin but to live a life fully in accord with God's will. Moreover, because we also share in the promise given us through Christ's resurrection, we need not fear sin or death. In Christ, we are dead to sin and alive for God. Why, then, would anyone want to sin any longer?

Matthew

Our Gospel reading for this Sunday is the conclusion of Jesus' instructions to his Twelve Apostles before he sends them out on mission. Everything Jesus says in Chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel, then, can be read as outlining what it means to accept a vocation from him. The first lines of our Gospel reading are a reminder to the apostles of what their top priority must be. It is not a rejection of family, but an affirmation that following Jesus is even more important than their families. Secondly, following Jesus might lead to difficulties at times. We should expect the cross. Thirdly, it is worth noting that Jesus makes himself – not the Father, not the Law of Moses – as the top priority for his apostles. Neither Moses nor any prophet would have spoken like this. Jesus as Emmanuel, God-With-Us, alone can reveal fully who God is and so can call forth total commitment from his disciples. Just as he has come to do not his own will but that of his Father, so, too, anyone who is a disciple of Jesus must make him their absolute priority. This is crucial, since the apostles represent Jesus. Those who welcome them, welcome him. Therefore, they must reflect him in their own lives. Finally, Jesus promises that all who welcome the apostles welcome him and will be blessed for doing so. The apostles, and all Christian missionaries of the early Church, depended on someone to welcome them, feed them, and give them places to stay as they traveled from city to city. When Jesus taught the apostles to pray, in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us each day our daily bread," this was the first meaning of that prayer. The apostles went forth in faith that someone would welcome and feed them wherever they went.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The Shunammite woman insisted, at first, that she needed nothing from Elisha or God. Why do we sometimes find it difficult to acknowledge our need before God? Are we afraid of what God might give us? What keeps us from trusting him more?
2. Paul assures us that, through baptism, we have died to sin and now live for Christ. Still, temptation remains a dangerous foe in our lives. How can we help one another discover and believe in the grace of God when faced by temptations?

3. The Gospel reading speaks of the importance of hospitality for missionaries who traveled from city to city spreading the Gospel. How can we offer hospitality and support for those of us who are called to dedicate their lives to the Gospel today?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Jesus teaches us that if we wish to truly follow him, we must make him the top priority in our lives. When you have some time and space, look at the priorities in your life based on the decisions you have made. In which areas of your life is Jesus the top priority? In which areas is he not? What needs to change so that Jesus truly is your top priority throughout your life? Pray for the wisdom and faith to follow through on what you have found.

PRAYING TOGETHER

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD;
All the families of nations
will bow low before him.
For kingship belongs to the LORD,
the ruler over the nations.
All who sleep in the earth
will bow low before God;
All who have gone down into the dust
will kneel in homage.
And I will live for the LORD;
my descendants will serve you.
The generation to come will be told of the Lord,
that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn
the deliverance you have brought.

- From **Psalm 22**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Carmelite author Ruth Burrows writes that we should come before the Lord “with empty hands.” In other words, if we wish to welcome the Lord into our hearts, our basic attitude before him must be our sense of utter need and vulnerability. It is the idea that the Lord knows what we truly need and that we can trust his love with our very lives. It’s easy to write; it’s very difficult to live. True vulnerability is unnerving, even frightening. In a threatening world, we seek to protect ourselves. Some protection is indeed necessary. But love makes us vulnerable to those we love. We can be hurt by them, but we can also be loved by them. The walls that make us feel safer also make it more difficult for us to truly love and be open to love.

We see this in the Shunammite woman in our first reading. In many ways, she appears as a good and very capable person. She is someone we would admire today. And yet, she found it difficult to put aside the security her extended family, her wealth and her abilities gave her in

order to receive something that God wanted to give her through Elisha. Then that very gift – her son – became ill and died, revealing to her in the most direct way her own vulnerability and powerlessness. At times, a seeming disaster may be necessary in our lives to open our hearts deeply enough to embrace our true vulnerability and to be more fully open to the great gifts that God wishes to bless us with.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus affirms that whoever receives someone he sends receives him. Catholic doctrine declares that the priest acts *in persona Christi* – in the person of Christ. This is most evident in the Mass, when the priest speaks the words of Christ in the Eucharistic Prayer and then feeds the community with the body and blood of Christ, but it is also true in general. We may find it difficult to affirm this teaching in an age when we have been made acutely aware of the failings of some priests. Yet, the New Testament, in its stunning honesty, did not hesitate to point out the failures of the apostles themselves. We can affirm this teaching because it is a grace given to us by the Lord. He chooses to act through priests.

But not only through priests. All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are incorporated into the Church and become a priestly people. In a broader sense, we are all called to act *in persona Christi*. This is another way of saying that we are called to be saints. All of us. One reason that saints are popular is that each one of them provides us a lived example of what it meant to follow Christ in their time and place. So it is with us. People look to us as Christians to give them examples of what it means to be a follower of Christ now. We need to offer this to a world hungry for faith, hope and love. We cannot do this alone, however. We need persistent prayer and faith and love. We need the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. We need the gift of the sacraments. It is good to remember that, for some people, we may be the only Gospel they ever read. We are, as Jesus put it, a city set on a hill and the light of the world.

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