

Homily for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Letting go is often a hard thing to do. Maybe it's parents letting go of their children who are off to college, leaving the safety nest of home. Or, maybe it's letting go of a family member or friend who died, that we just weren't ready to say goodbye to yet. Or, if you've seen the commercials for the smart phone app, "Let Go", then maybe it's letting go of something old that you never use anymore, but still drag around with you, rather than selling it for someone else to use!

We all know that letting go can be hard, but why is it so difficult? Well, often when we have trouble letting go, it's because we're holding on to the way we want to do things or the way we want things to turn out. It's a form of control in other words. Just look at our first reading today from 1 Kings to get a taste of what I mean. When Elijah comes to Elisha to appoint him to succeed him as the prophet of the Lord, what does Elisha do? He doesn't immediately drop everything and follow Elijah. Rather, he says, let me say goodbye to my parents first. Now, we might think that's a reasonable request. But what would have happened on his way into the house to say goodbye? Maybe he would have seen other family members to say goodbye to as well. And then maybe his mother would have said supper is ready. And then maybe someone would have reminded him of all the work he had to do plowing tomorrow and next week. And all the while Elijah – and the Lord – are waiting outside.

Now, in the end, it seems Elisha didn't do things that way. Instead, he took those oxen that were used for the plowing, and he took the plowing equipment to make a fire, and he prepared a sacrificial meal right on the spot to share with his neighbors. What more can this represent other than Elisha letting go of his past life – renouncing his previous life for this new vocation as a disciple of Elijah the prophet?

And then in our Gospel today, Jesus brings to mind this very incident when a potential disciple says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Again, that might seem like an extremely appropriate request, and Jesus' reply of "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" might seem to us insensitive at best. But, it illustrates the point of the urgency and the total commitment required to be a true disciple of Jesus.

Bottom line in all of this – don't make excuses when it comes to being a follower of Jesus. Don't say, "I'll take my faith more seriously when I retire, or when I get older, or when I have more time." Don't say, "I don't want to be a Jesus freak and one of those saints; mediocrity is good enough." Don't say, "it's good enough that I come to Mass each week; do you know how many people don't even do that?"

My friends, Jesus gave His entire life, shedding His blood to the last drop, so that we could be saved. And He desires of us to a total, personal, and life-long commitment. He wants to be the Lord of our lives in every way. But if we make excuses, which we all can do, then what happens? Well, St. Paul in our second reading today says: “For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” So, the excuses we make not to completely belong to Jesus actually lead us back into slavery – slavery to our senses, to our preferences, to our wills, to our desires. But we have been freed from all of that so we can live in true freedom – the freedom of knowing the joy and the peace and the eternal fulfillment of living for God and not for ourselves.

All of this is easy to say, and quite difficult to live, I know. But that’s why God gives us His grace, in a special way in this holy Eucharist. It’s His grace that truly enables us to “let go and let God”. In this way we increasingly become worthy of the inheritance He has called us to – heavenly glory. God bless you.