

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 28, 2020

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a
Psalm 89: 2-3, 16-17, 18-19
Romans 6:3-4, 8-11
Matthew 10:37-42

“Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6).

These first century words of wisdom were taken from the 6th chapter of St Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. The Book of Romans is considered by many biblical scholars to be St Paul’s greatest masterpiece, a magnum opus if you will declaring the grace of God to all those who by faith would live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.” How much more should we respond to Him out of love for what He has already done knowing that our salvation is not based on keeping the letter of the Mosaic Law. Hence, our justification is based solely on the merits of Jesus Christ. Therefore we teach as did the OT prophet Habakkuk write, and the Scribe of The Book of Hebrews later restate, “the just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4, Gal. 3:11, and Heb 10:38).

The bottom line is - Christians are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and subsequently we are to walk in faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) because only by faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ are we made righteous and free from the tyranny of sin.

Written some 22-25 years after the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into Heaven, the blessed apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to write to the many Jewish Christians - who even though they had received the saving grace of Jesus, for the most part they still lived under the letter of the Jewish Law and its many legal restrictions.

An example of what we mean by still living under the Mosaic Law would be the belief and the corresponding practice that in order for male Gentile believers to be saved, they must be circumcised in order for them to become incorporated as members of the Body of Christ.

Later we know that the Council of Jerusalem, a conference of elders and apostles who met in Jerusalem in approximately 50 AD declared that Gentiles must not be forced to observe the Mosaic and Rabbinical Laws and regulations regarding male circumcision.

The point here being that St Paul wrote many of his letters, including the Book of Romans as a means by which to establish the theological boundaries, if you will, of the growing Church, indeed what was to be considered and believed and practiced as orthodox Christianity and what was not.

Here some might argue, why do we need the apostles to give us their interpretation concerning this information? Why can we not just live according to what Jesus said and taught? Why do we need what some may call second hand information and interpretation from the Apostles? Well, the answers to these and other like questions are not easily reasoned and understood.

If you recall from last week's homily we stated that some of the

teachings of Jesus can be rather unsettling, and as we shall soon note - very difficult to understand and/or practice. Take for example what Jesus said to His apostles in this morning's gospel reading:

Whoever loves his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Now I don't know about you, but at first glance I could find this passage and others like it to be a little unsettling, and I am sure the apostles had similar nervous feelings.

However there is a reasonable explanation for what Jesus said and why He spoke as He did. First of all we need to consider, to whom was Jesus speaking when He gave this particular teaching? Referring once again to last week's homily we need to mention that today's gospel reading also comes from Jesus' second Missionary discourse as well. Jesus was preparing His disciples for their missionary callings. Yet today in certain circumstances the same principles may be applicable for those who are called to serve Him.

Secondly we need to be mindful that this Gospel passage has two primary themes. The first involves the cost of discipleship and the second concerns the rewards for obedience. Beginning with the theme of the cost of discipleship we must also equate the term disciple with its first century meaning. To a first century Jewish person - to be a disciple meant to be a student under a particular Rabbi or teacher's tutelage.

So here we note that the disciples were considered to be Jesus' students. As a Rabbi during that time period it would be considered

normal to have a group of men as your disciples. But what would not be normal would be for your teacher to say - who ever loves his father or mother, son or daughter more than me is not worthy to be my student.

Imagine for a moment a 12th grade history teacher telling the class, unless you love me more than your parents and family you cannot be in my class, nor can you graduate. Or what if a college or university professor required the same commitment; well, more than likely most of us would be out the door with the notion of - forget you. But not Jesus, he was quite bold in making the exact same statement - love me more than anything else or have no part in me.

So how could He do this to his disciples when in the Ten Commandments we are mandated to honor our parents and care for our children? There is no doubt in my mind He had their attention along with a measure of consternation.

So then back to the Bible we must go for the answer. Here we are directed to meditate on Deuteronomy 6:4-6 where under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit Moses wrote:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!
Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words, which I command you today.

So, love the Lord, your God with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Think about it, these somewhat problematic words spoken by Jesus to His disciples make sense only – only if He were truly God. Only then could He possibly

demand that they love Him more than anything else in the world.

Indeed another living proof that Jesus was who He said He was, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father," either Jesus was the Son of God or He had gone absolutely mad and He was out of His mind. We get to choose what we believe.

So what we see here in today's gospel reading was that Jesus was merely exegeting the first part of the *Schema*, the Jewish declaration of faith taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-6, which by the way could be likened to our *Nicene Creed*, - and based on that profession of faith - Jesus was asking His disciples to flesh out that statement by loving Him with a radical unselfish kind of love, a love so intense that they would of necessity be required to leave everything behind, pick up their crosses, and then follow after Him.

You see, nothing less will do, if we try to save our lives we will lose them, but if we give our lives completely to Him we will find our lives secure in Him for eternity.

Indeed, by faith the just shall live. St Paul heard the call and he knew it well. He was committed to running the race for Christ and his mission was to reestablish in the Church's collective consciousness of the necessity of God's grace for salvation. Thankfully, the Mosaic Law was intended as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ; however, though necessary to distinguish right from wrong, by itself it could not save us.

So then what is our response, what are we to do to work out our salvation? One thing for sure is that Jesus has not left us alone as orphans without care. He has provided for our continual wellbeing.

In the Gospel of Matthew and taken from the Greek language we read,

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28).¹

Jesus has given us the wonderful privilege of becoming one with Him and the means by which this gift of grace is given is by the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is indeed a truly amazing gift.

When we stop to think about it, the disciples were faced with some pretty difficult teachings. Would you agree? We've already talked about some of them, and needless to say it took a measure of faith to accept those teachings and carry on. And so now we know why the writer of Hebrews wrote, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:1). Nevertheless we too are faced with some very similar faith stimulating teachings, and one in particular comes to mind. Jesus also said,

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him (John 6:53-56).

Needless to say this provocative statement has baffled the minds of

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2009/11/the-lords-supper-part-i-compare-the-words-of-institution.html>

the best of biblical scholars, but for you and me it boils down to a measure of faith. Either we die to our human reasoning and believe it in faith or we hold on to our intellectual liberties and scoff it away to hyperbole and/or metaphor. But once again like the disciples, we have to choose which route we will take. If Jesus is taken literally we either believe or have no part in Him.

Therefore as we prepare our hearts to receive His precious Body and Blood this morning, let us be mindful that this miraculous gift of grace is free to us thanks to Jesus, but let us never forget as St Paul so eloquently taught us,

We who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-4).

Hopefully we have learned a little more what it means to die with Christ. Therefore let us purpose to believe in our Lord Jesus and give Him all the glory, honor, and praise in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

