

Sunday, June 30, 2019

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21

2nd Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13-18

Responsorial: Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11

Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

Keeping Our Eyes Fixed on the Lord and His Call -- Not Our Past

No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

Is Jesus being unreasonable? All this man wanted to do was say goodbye to his family before following Jesus. Didn't Elijah permit Elisha to say his good-byes before leaving (1 Kings 19:19-21)? To make matters worse, Jesus' response to the two other would-be disciples seems a little rigid, even unwelcoming. Was Jesus actually trying to discourage these people from following him?

If you're suspecting that something deeper is going on here, you're probably right. First, it helps to remember how this passage fits into Luke's timeline: we have just learned that Jesus is now "resolutely" traveling to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). The hour of his passion is drawing near. Luke is showing us a new sense of urgency in Jesus' life and message. There just isn't time left for secondary things—even good, important things. For those individuals whom the Lord is calling, it's now or never!

Second, we don't know how they responded to Jesus' words. Maybe there was more to the conversation; we don't know that either. That's because Luke is actually more interested in encouraging us, his readers, to follow Jesus than in recounting the details of an event long past. As one commentator has put it, we may not know how they responded, but we do know what our own response ought to be.

There's no doubt about it; this is a hard word to hear. But Jesus knows how challenging it can be. He knows that he is asking a lot of us. He also knows how much grace he has stored up to help you. He has already determined to forgive you when you fall and to encourage you when the going gets tough. He is never one to issue a command and then wait for you to fail at it. No, he will do everything he can to help you accomplish it—short of overpowering your free will, of course!

"Yes, Lord, I will follow you wherever you lead. I trust that your grace will be enough for me."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading describes how Elisha followed God's inspiration and call, which came through the prophet Elijah: It ends with these words: *Elisha left him, and taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat. Then Elisha left and followed Elijah as his attendant.*
 - Why do you think Elisha chose to give up everything and follow Elijah, in spite of what the costs might be?
 - What are some of the fears that can keep us from following God or can cause us to think he is asking too much of us?
 - What are the "things" God has been asking of you that you have been struggling to carry out? What steps can you take to be more responsive to God's call on your life?
2. The responsorial psalm reminds us that God our Father is not a demanding taskmaster: *Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge; I say to the LORD, "My Lord are you. O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot." I bless the LORD who counsels me; even in the night my heart exhorts me. I set the LORD ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.*
 - In what ways does the psalm remind us that God our Father is full of love and kindness toward us?
 - How do you view God the Father? Do you view him as a loving, kind, and merciful Father who "counsels" us, who will not "abandon" us, who promises us "fullness of joys" and "delights" at his "right hand forever"? Or do you view him as a demanding taskmaster? Why is it important to have a correct image of our heavenly Father?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. For you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.* It ends with these words: *I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.*
 - The second reading begins by telling us that *For freedom Christ set us free* and that *we were called for freedom.* What do these words mean to you?
 - What practical steps can you take to respond to God's call to *serve one another through love* by serving your brothers and sisters in Christ in your parish, in your small groups, and in your community?
 - St. Paul tells us to *live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.* Why is this so?
4. The Gospel reading ends with these words: *As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." To him Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."*

 - The Gospel reading reiterates a point from the first reading, i.e., there is a cost to saying yes to God's call and in following and obeying his will -- rather than our own. What are some things you can do to allow God, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to become more involved in your decision-making and action?
 - How often do you pray and ask God to reveal his will prior to making an important decision, rather than just quickly deciding on your own?

5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the Gospel reading: *No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke 9:62). It ends with these words: "There's no doubt about it; this is a hard word to hear. But Jesus knows how challenging it can be. He knows that he is asking a lot of us. He also knows how much grace he has stored up to help you. He has already determined to forgive you when you fall and to encourage you when the going gets tough. He is never one to issue a command and then wait for you to fail at it. No, he will do everything he can to help you accomplish it—short of overpowering your free will, of course!"
 - When it comes to responding to Jesus' call for your life, why is it important each day to rely on the grace "he has stored up to help you," then to allow past failures or regrets to hold you back?
 - What do the following words mean to you? "He is never one to issue a command and then wait for you to fail at it. No, he will do everything he can to help you accomplish it—short of overpowering your free will, of course!"
 - What are some examples from your own life when Jesus' grace was sufficient for you to get through a difficult time?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for the grace and strength to say yes to following him. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Yes, Lord, I will follow you wherever you lead. I trust that your grace will be enough for me."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partner]