

## Thirteenth Sunday of the Year

### **First reading:**

*The Call of Elisha*

*(1 Kings 19.16b, 19-21)*

This story is clearly chosen by the Church to pair with the latter part of the gospel reading, or even possibly in reverse, for Jesus' call to the unnamed disciple seems to be modelled on Elijah's call to Elisha.

Elisha must have been a rich man to have 12 yoke of oxen ploughing his field - a large field and a hefty herd. Elijah's gesture of throwing his mantle over Elisha is to claim Elisha as his own. When Elijah is taken up to heaven his mantle falls on Elisha again, giving him a double share of his spirit. By slaughtering the oxen and burning the tackle, Elisha destroys his own livelihood, but he is allowed to take leave of his family before taking up the life of a prophet.

Elijah was a fearless prophet of Israel, inspired by the vision of God (at the cave on Mount Horeb) and uncompromisingly defending the rights of God against idolatry (the prophets of Baal) and injustice even by the king (Naboth's Vineyard). He was expected to come again to herald the final coming of God, and many saw him in John the Baptist. Elisha was perhaps more a political operator, furthering God's plans by the appointment of rulers.

### Question:

*Does Elijah think that Elisha is too slow to respond? Do you?*

### **Second reading:**

*Freedom to Love*

*(Galatians 5.1, 13-18)*

Paul is still, as last Sunday, warning the Galatians against regarding themselves as bound by the Jewish Law. This is an external restriction, whereas Paul wants them to be led only by the interior Spirit of God, which will lead them in the paths of love.

It is important to understand correctly the distinction between the flesh and the Spirit. The sins of the flesh are not merely 'carnal' sins like sex, greed and overindulgence. They include also such things as rivalry, jealousy, quarrels and malice. So 'the flesh' is more generally self-indulgence and lack of self-discipline, perhaps unrestrained natural desires. These are not in themselves evil, but they need to be harnessed and directed by the impetus of the Spirit.

By the same token, the Spirit is the life of Christ in us, and motivates everything that leads to Christ, not only - as Paul here lists - 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control', but also everything that builds up the community in love, loving guidance, teaching, the healing touch, as well as the more striking gifts like speaking in tongues. In 1 Corinthians, he explains that each member of the community has a special gift, and all these are needed for a healthy community.

### Question:

*What gifts can you contribute to the life of your Christian community? What gifts do you lack that you see in people around you?*

**Gospel:**      *Uncompromising Discipleship*

*(Luke 9.51-62))*

The latter half of Luke's gospel, as Jesus embarks on his great journey to his death at Jerusalem, is marked by Jesus' teaching on the difficulties and challenges of discipleship.

Right at the beginning comes the little lesson that the disciple must not be surprised or take vengeance at rejection. Then, three lessons on the uncompromising demands of discipleship. These are not 'counsels of perfection', but demanded of every disciple of Jesus.

First, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. The disciple has no right to creature comforts. Second, perhaps the most counter-cultural of all Jesus' demands, for burying a dead father was regarded as a sacred duty, and yet not even this may stand in the way of a response to the call of Jesus. Third, a more rigorous condition than even Elijah demanded of Elisha, no backward glance even to bid the family farewell. Not even the most sacred of natural ties may stand in the way of the demands of following Jesus.

These conditions may seem unfeeling and unacceptably harsh: Jesus expresses his teaching with maximum vigour. This is partly the nature of the Semitic language, which rarely uses a comparative, 'more than ... ' It is either day or night, no dusk! But we must beware of softening what must remain hard.

**Question:**

*How can I participate more fully in Jesus' gift of the Eucharist?*

*Better preparation beforehand?*

*Reflection afterwards?*

*Fuller attention during the Mass?*