

July 2, 2023
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus said to his apostles: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple--amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward."

Background:

The Gospel text for this Sunday is the conclusion of Jesus' instruction to the apostles before he sends them out to preach to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Matthew describes Jesus as being moved with compassion for the people because "they were troubled and abandoned." (Matthew 9:36) Therefore, Jesus has called twelve of his disciples and bestowed upon them the authority that he himself was given, and he sends them to the lost. The instruction that the apostles received last week continues in this Gospel.

This Gospel text is the first time in Matthew's Gospel where the word cross is used. We may associate the cross here with the cross of Jesus. While that may be a way to personally reflect on the Gospel, to focus exclusively on Jesus' cross misses the reality that Jesus and his contemporaries lived in a world where the Romans used crucifixion as a form of execution to discourage undesired behavior. A Roman general crucified 2,000 Jews and placed them on the roadsides of Galilee after putting down an attempted revolt.

Jesus cautions the apostles that they must love him more than one's family. This is shocking to Jesus' contemporaries. Most of us in our culture were raised in a way that would prepare us for the day when we would leave home to start our own families. For a person to leave one's family would be difficult to imagine for Jesus' contemporaries. One's life and identity were tied to maintaining their status within their family and society. You may think of the fate of the young prodigal son. Worth, honor, and financial support were all based in one's family.

While Jesus' way of instructing may seem peculiar and even a bit offensive in our culture, that would not have been so for the people that Jesus was addressing. Jesus was speaking in a way that was familiar to the Jews of his day. Many believed that when the time came breaking into history, there would be division among families, and one member of a family rising up against another. Even today, those familiar with the RCIA can recount stories of families ostracizing those who have chosen to join the Catholic Church.

While Jesus' instruction reminds the disciples of what they are leaving behind, he also speaks of what they will receive. They were the first ones to have received Jesus himself, and they will receive the prophet's reward. They too are being sent as representatives of Jesus. They can expect a similar reward. As the simplest act of courtesy, giving a cup of water, will reap abundant blessing from God, the gift of their sacrifice to proclaim God's coming will be blessed in the same way. Jesus' instruction would have made a shocking impact on the early disciples as they prepared to proclaim the coming of God. He reminds them of the dedication required of them, and the great blessing being bestowed on them for their willingness to accept this responsibility. While Jesus' disciples risk the real possibility of being rejected by family, they are also joining a new community whose central relationship is in Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

1. How many different support networks are you part of?
2. Do you have a sense that you too are part of these organizations?
3. How are you affected by dividedness within the society in which we live?
4. Are you one who enjoys transition and new possibilities, or one who prefers consistency?
5. Who are the people whose relationship you most value?
6. Has your relationship with God ever come between your other relationships?
7. Do you know people who have had family relationships threatened or lost because of their effort to live as they believed God has called them?
8. When it comes to your spiritual life and relationship to God, how is God present in the difficult and painful periods of your life?
9. Can you take some time now to talk to God about your own desire for and/or fear of being in relationship with God?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for July 2, 2023, the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

One day Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman who urged him to dine with her. Afterward, whenever he passed by, he used to stop there to dine. She said to her husband, "Elisha is a holy man of God. Let us arrange a little room on the roof and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp, so that when he comes to us he can stay there." Some time later Elisha arrived and stayed in the room overnight. Later Elisha asked, "Can something be done for her?" His servant Gehazi answered, "Yes! She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years." Elisha said, "Call her." When the woman had been called and stood at the door, Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son."

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.
Through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness.
For you have said, "My kindness is established forever;" in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.
Blessed the people who know the joyful shout; in the light of your countenance they walk.
At your name they rejoice all the day, and through your justice they are exalted.
You are the splendor of their strength, and by your favor our horn is exalted.

To the Lord belongs our shield, and the Holy One of Israel, our king.

Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ
was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.
If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.
We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.
As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God.
Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said to his apostles:

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.
Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.
Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward,
and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward.
And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink
because the little one is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward."

Excerpts from 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16A; Psalm 89:2-3, 16-19; Romans 6:3-4, 8-11; and Matthew 10:37-42

Friends,

Here (attached) are the Gospel background and reflection questions for July 2nd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus tells the apostles what makes someone worthy of him, and what are the rewards of a welcome. "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me," he tells them. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Whoever welcomes a disciple, even with only a cup of water, because he is a disciple, will surely not lose his reward."

The other readings also have references to worthiness, receiving prophets and disciples, and rewards. In the first reading from 2 Kings, a woman and her husband at Shunem provide a room for whenever the prophet Elisha visits there. In appreciation he promises her, "In a year you will have a son." Psalm 89 proclaims the goodness of the Lord: "His promises I will sing forever," and "Through your justice your people are exalted." In the second reading, from the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "We were buried with Christ Jesus through baptism into death, so that, just as he was raised from the dead by the Father, we too might live in new life."

Here are four more lines on one thread to consider, in the sequence of the readings: When the woman at Shunem accommodates the prophet, he is moved to ask, "Can something be done for her?" The psalm rejoins, "In heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness." Paul adds, "Christ is raised from the dead; death no longer has power over him. He lives for God. Think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus." And Jesus says, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!