

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time- A: Putting Christ First: The Cost and Joy of True Discipleship: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a; Rom 6:3-4, 8-11; Mat 10:37-42

Once, while a monk was speaking to a gathering of believers, a young man asked, "Master, how should I best use my days so that God will be pleased with my life?" The monk replied, "**Live with love.**" A few minutes later another man asked exactly the same question. This time the monk answered, "**Live with joy.**" The first man was confused. "Master, you gave us two different answers." The monk smiled and said, "**No, they are the same. A person who truly loves God lives with joy, and a joyful heart is always a loving heart.**"

This is exactly what today's readings teach us. They invite us to love Christ above everything else, to die to ourselves, and to welcome Christ in others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says something that sounds difficult: "**Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.**" Does Jesus want us to love our families less? Certainly not. The same Jesus taught us to honor our parents and love our neighbors. What He is saying is this: **God must always come first.**

Think of a wheel. If the hub at the center is strong, every spoke remains connected. Christ is the center of our lives. When He is first, you love your spouses better, become more patient parents, more caring children, and more forgiving friends. But when Christ is pushed aside, every other relationship begins to suffer. Jesus then says, "**Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**"

Many people say, "My sickness is my cross," or "My difficult family is my cross." Those struggles are real, but Jesus means something even deeper. In His time, the cross was an instrument of shame and death. To carry one's cross meant choosing faithfulness even when it involved sacrifice. Today your cross may be standing for honesty when others cheat, forgiving someone who deeply hurt you, remaining faithful to your marriage vows, defending your faith in a secular world, or serving others without expecting appreciation. Discipleship always has a cost, but it also brings lasting joy.

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that through Baptism we have died with Christ and risen with Him. Our old selfish way of living has been buried. Every day

we are invited to die to pride, anger, selfishness, and sin, so that Christ may live more fully in us.

The first reading gives us a beautiful example of this spirit. The woman of Shunem welcomed the prophet Elisha into her home. She did not expect anything in return. She simply recognized God's presence in His servant and generously offered hospitality. God rewarded her generosity with the gift of a son, something she never imagined possible.

Jesus echoes this lesson in today's Gospel. He tells us that whoever welcomes His disciples welcomes Him, and even offering **a cup of cold water** in His name will not go unrewarded. God notices every hidden act of kindness. No act of love is ever wasted.

Today's readings leave us with three simple questions: Is Christ truly the first priority in my life? Am I willing to carry my cross faithfully, even when it is difficult? Do I recognize Christ in the people who come into my life, especially the poor, the lonely, and those in need?

When Christ is first, everything else finds its proper place. When we die to ourselves, we discover new life. And when we welcome others with generous hearts, we welcome Christ Himself. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to love Him above everything else, to carry our crosses with courage, and to serve others with joyful hearts. Then we will discover that the Christian life, though demanding, is also the most joyful and rewarding life we can ever live. **Amen**