

HOMILY for 13th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

Today's Gospel tells us about the rewards that we'll receive for all the compassionate & generous acts that we do. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A businessman saw a beggar asking for some money. But, he was rather put off when the bum approached him with a request for five dollars to buy a cup of coffee.

"Sir, you can buy a cup of coffee for sixty cents," the businessman responded tartly.

"Right you are," conceded the bum cheerfully, "but I like to leave a big tip!"

Anyway, in today's Gospel, Jesus said to His disciples: "...Whoever does not take up the Cross & follow me cannot be my disciples... And I promise you that whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones because he is a disciple will receive his reward." We call recall how Jesus called His first disciples. We were told that Jesus walked by the place where they worked & asked them to follow Him; & they left their families & all their belongings to be His disciples. One of those places was where the fishermen docked their boats. Jesus indeed got most of His disciples from this site since they were fishermen. Another site that Jesus frequented to recruit His first disciples was the custom post, where the Jewish authority collected their taxes from the public. One of those disciples was a tax collector who was the most hated people in the Jewish society because they collaborated with the occupying force to take the hard-earned money from the common folks & used their power to extort money from their countrymen. But, I do not recall that, in the beginning, Jesus told them to take up the Cross & follow Him. Only later did He reveal to them what it meant to follow Him & be His disciples.

Similarly, none of us has heard a priest/minister/deacon tell us on the day of our baptism that we'll have to take up the Cross & follow Jesus. All we've heard on that special day is that we have become the Children of God & will be saved on the Last Day. We might have thought that we would witness a lot of Jesus' miracles like the first disciples did & our faith journey with Jesus would be a walk in the park. The Lord would answer all of our prayers & protect us from harm. We would have nothing to worry about. But, we do not realize that our relationship with Jesus is the journey of the Cross. He would ask us to take up our daily crosses & follow in His footsteps because that is exactly what He did. Unfortunately, we have TV evangelists like Joe Olsteen who has preached the prosperity gospel & promised that the Lord would take care of all their problems. He has sugar-coated his messages & told his audience that they would not have change their sinful ways of life & take up their crosses to follow Jesus. Unfortunately, many naïve people have bought into that message of a fake prophet & supported his extravagant lifestyle. They have let him tell them only what they want to hear.

However, today Jesus wants to tell us the truth about His discipleship & its costs. He got tired of seeing fake prophets dupe the faithful & aspiring Christians who want to follow Him by a path other than the way of the Cross. Here is Jesus' own words about His discipleship: "...Whoever does not take up the Cross & follow me cannot be my disciple." In other words, there is a cost to be Jesus's disciples. We'll have to face lots of challenges & persecution to be His disciples, but He'll be there to support & encourage us. We'll have to make all sorts of sacrifices in this life to follow our Christian way of life. We'll have to detach ourselves from

worldly possessions & all the relationships that might keep us away from Jesus, including the one with our families & friends. But, that way of life will bring us true peace & happiness.

Besides calling us to be His disciples & telling us the true cost of His discipleship, Jesus also lets us know the reward of being a kind & generous disciple of His, even when we give someone a cup of water. Sometimes we overlook the importance of being kind & charitable to the poor & the misfortunate. But, that is a very important duty in our Christian faith; & today we've heard that Jesus promises the reward for people who do that. Yet, it's hard for us to practice that virtue when we see people exploit our kindness & compassion for their own benefits without truly being poor & desperate. That exploitation makes the public have less compassion for the legitimate poor & less desire to find the real solution for this social problem. In fact, throughout our human history, we've heard all sorts of stories about people in need of help. The Bible is full of examples about compassionate & generous people who had reached out to help people in need. Today's First Reading tells us one of those Bible stories about an elderly couple who generously helped out Prophet Elisha in need. Because of their compassionate & generous heart, the Lord repaid the couple & blessed them with a child in their old age.

Each religion has its own unique features that differentiate it from other ones. But, one thing that all religions around the world share is that they teach its faithful members to help out the poor & people in need. In fact, I've never heard of any religion that would reject people in need or ignore the cry of the poor. Can you imagine how our world would turn out if all religions would practice this common feature every day? We would certainly have a more compassionate & generous world & have reduced the number of the poor by now. Unfortunately, we've let the Devil weaponize religion to stir up fights & divide our human family. Over the centuries people have used religion to advance their own ambition & benefit them at the cost of others. We still see the misuse of religion in our time as people continue to spread hate & kill one another in the name of religion. This sin must have brought shame & distress to our Creator. So, we must stop this sin & use religion to help people in need & bring our human family together. That way we'll be rewarded abundantly in this life & the next for our acts of charity.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus is glad that we've answered His call to be His disciples. But, if we want to follow Him, we'll have to take up our daily crosses & walk with Him. Along that journey, we're asked to be compassionate & help out people in need. If we can do that, He'll bless us with great rewards in this life & the next. And the Kingdom of Heaven is certainly within our reach.