

## **HOMILY for 13<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C**

A little boy was struggling to recall his lines for a Sunday school presentation. His mother sat in the front row to prompt him, gesturing and forming the words silently with her lips, but to no avail.

Finally, she leaned forward and whispered the cue, “I am the light of the world.”

The child beamed and, with great feeling and a loud, clear voice, said, “My mom is the light of the world.”

Jesus sure wants us, like the mother in the cute story, to be the light of the world. But, before we can be the light of the world, we need to answer Jesus’ call to follow Him & be near Him. For that’s how we can receive the light & its lasting power from Jesus to keep our light burning bright. Without the light of Christ, our light will not turn on. Similarly, if our light does not use the power of Christ, it will quickly run out of power & turn dark. That is why we need to answer Jesus’ call of discipleship & staying close to Him.

The first call of discipleship was shared with us in this Sunday’s First Reading as Elijah called Elisha to follow in his footsteps. Here’s how that call was shared with us, “...Elijah set out & came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him & threw his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen & ran after Elijah.” Was that how you first heard our Lord calling you? Did He call you while you were busy working? Did He throw his cloak over you & give you a pat on the back as He called you to be His disciple?

In case that is not how the Lord called you to follow Him, this Sunday’s Gospel gives us another scenario that Jesus might have used to recruit His new disciples. It says, “...As they were making their way along, someone said to Him, ‘I will be your follower wherever you go.’ Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Come after me.’” Was that your experience when you heard Jesus calling you to follow Him? Did you volunteer yourself to be His disciple or did Jesus have to call you out? Would you change your mind about following Jesus after He told you that He didn’t even have a place to rest?

As you might have learned from this Sunday’s First Reading & Gospel, many of His potential disciples were tied up with a personal matter or a professional job. They got distracted by their personal & professional problems & had to ask permission to go home & take care of those things. They sure did not answer Jesus’ call of discipleship with their whole heart & mind. Here’s Jesus’ reply to them, “Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the Kingdom of God.” In other words, if we commit ourselves to follow Jesus & work for the Kingdom of God, we cannot let anything in this world distract us & get our eyes off that main focus. Otherwise, that work will never get done; & we cannot fit to be Jesus’ disciples & deserve a place in the Kingdom of God.

Answering Jesus’ call to be His followers is not as easy as filling out an Application Form for a Baptism. Rather, it’s about saying yes to Jesus in good times as well as in bad, when things go our way & also when they don’t. It’s about putting our trust in His guidance when our life is turned upside down, when our whole world has become chaotic, when we are surrounded by darkness & uncertainty. It’s about continuing to have hope in a better future that the Lord has prepared for us & the eternal life that He has promised us in God’s Kingdom. It’s about

committing ourselves to follow His Commandments when the world calls us to follow its ways instead. It's about knowing right from wrong & having the courage to stand up against what is unloving & unchristian. It's about reaching out to help the misfortunate in their difficult time & bring healing & comfort to the broken in their time of pain and anguish. That's what it means to answer Jesus' call.

But, we all know that there're all kinds of distractions & pressure in the world to stop us from answering that call. The easiest example for this is not returning to the physical Church building for worship with the congregation by some church members since the easing of the Covid pandemic. Up to now, people are so used to Sunday worship by watching Mass on Television or Computer at some Church. They would rather answer Jesus' call when it's convenient to their schedule or their comfort level. But, if that call interferes with other things in their life, they would turn it down & do whatever they want. Another example about distractions & pressure by the world is to run after whatever makes people feel good & look good. For some, that would be pleasure & alcohol. For others, it'd be glamor & fame. Of course, money & power is what keeps many people from committing themselves totally to Jesus. For they're too busy making lots of money or acquiring more power for themselves. Hence, they don't have time for Jesus or Church worship. Certainly, there're a lot of other distractions & pressure that you can think of to keep people from answering Jesus' call to be His followers.

My dear brothers & sisters, have you heard Jesus calling you yet? If He has, how have you answered His call? If one distraction or pressure that might keep you from following Jesus, what would that be? So, let me end my Homily here & leave with you this encouraging message of St. Paul (Romans 8:35-39): "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? ...For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord."