

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
June 30, 2019

The "Point of No Return," according to *Wikipedia*, is that "point beyond which one must continue on one's current course of action because turning back is dangerous, physically impossible or difficult, or prohibitively expensive." One possible course of action when approaching that point is to "burn one's bridges" or "burn one's boat."

In the year 1519 A.D., during the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire in what is now Mexico, history reports that the conquistador, Hernan Cortes, burned his boats...literally. His crew, somewhat uneasy in their precarious position, all alone in the New World, was at the "Point of No Return." Cortes' action forced his men to "conquer or die."

History is replete with instances when the "point of no return" was crossed, sometimes intentionally, such as when Julius Caesar "crossed the Rubicon" and more recently, when Coalition forces drew the "line in the sand" against the Iraqi troops of Saddam Hussein.

Today's readings highlight various "points of no return" in discipleship:

- In the first reading, Elisha had a decision to make: To follow and become a disciple of Elijah or stay with his family. After the

appropriate goodbyes to his father and mother, Elisha "burned his boats" by burning his plowing equipment to cook his oxen, his source of livelihood. That enabled him to freely follow God's call and become a disciple of, and ultimately the successor to, the great prophet, Elijah. Elisha, through his decisive action, demonstrated that he loved God more than his business, family and self.

- The Gospel reading, on the other hand, focuses, not so much on those who followed Jesus, but rather on those who didn't and why. After the first individual tells Jesus that he will "follow [him] wherever [he] goes," Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." With that response and those to the two other individuals who want to address family matters before following Him, Jesus is warning them that the path to discipleship is rugged and fraught with peril. Jesus is bluntly and firmly telling those desiring to follow Him (including us) that our resting place is not of this earth but in heaven and that the primary responsibility of every Christian is to get into the Kingdom of God. All work must lead toward our salvation in heaven, taking precedence over things of this world, **including family.**

Although we hear this admonition by Jesus, it can be very hard for us to accept because the road to heaven is not always smooth and level, but can be rocky and steep, at times.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' response to the aspiring disciples seems pretty harsh because they simply want to be good sons and fathers; good family members. Those are admirable intentions but I believe that this Gospel passage is using these harsh examples as hyperbole—to prove a point about what it means to be a disciple; what it costs to be a follower of Jesus.

All of our greatest saints traversed this rocky and steep road of discipleship, at times with great humor. For example, in the 16th century, St. Teresa of Avila, while making her way to her convent during a fierce rainstorm, slipped down an embankment and fell squarely into the mud. The irrepressible nun looked up to heaven and admonished her Maker, "If this is how You treat Your friends, Lord, no wonder You have so few of them!"

So, how do we respond to the call to become disciples of Jesus? In the Gospel, Jesus' rebuke of the Sons of Thunder, John and James, illustrates that vengeance is not an appropriate. However, in the second reading to the Galatians, St. Paul shows us the way by telling us:

*Not by following the strict observance of the law but rather by "serv[ing] one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, you shall **love your neighbor as yourself.**"*

Although loving your neighbor as yourself is not as easy as it sounds, it doesn't have to be that difficult either. As long as we truly wish to show compassion to our neighbors in need, we don't need to look far to find a myriad of opportunities, such as:

- Donating at the community blood bank
- Helping a child learn to read
- Visiting nursing home residents, or
- Helping out at our own Morning Glory Ministries.

When we make a concerted effort to help others, we become disciples of Jesus, who preached compassion over strict adherence to the law, and encouraged his followers to encounter and walk with, rather than judge, those around us.