

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - June 30, 2019

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Jesus was a Jew. ... The first Christians were Jews. So when some of these early Christian missionaries began to evangelize the gentiles ... many of those first Jewish Christians insisted that these **new** converts adhere to all the very legalistic provisions of Mosaic Law ... beginning... of course ... with circumcision. Some leaders felt this was necessary while others said it was not. The question was resolved by those first bishops in the **first** church council ... the Council of Jerusalem ... where Peter referred to these legalistic provisions as "... a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear". But even after the council decided it was **not** necessary ... in Galatia and elsewhere these so-called "Judaizers" **continued** to badger the new Christians ... insisting they adhere to all the Mosaic traditions.

Today we hear St. Paul reminding the Galatians ... that Christ died to **free** us from **slavery** to the law ... **but** ... he goes on to warn that **freedom** ... has a price! Christians were to be bound by **one** Commandment ... that of **love**. He then cautions them ... and us ... that ... freed from the slavery to the **law** ... we must **not** submit to the slavery of the **flesh**. For even though we have been freed from the legalistic demands of the law ... the commandment of **love** has its **own** demands.

Love demands that we give honor and praise to the God who freed us. It demands we treat others as we want to be treated. Love does not allow us to treat others as objects for our gratification. It does not allow us to covet or steal what is theirs. It does not allow us to kill them or deceive them. It also demands that we help them wherever we can. St. Augustine sums it up this way: "**Love ... and do what you will!**"

But freedom is **never** free! Our forefathers discovered this in the hard-fought war for independence from Great Britain which we commemorate this week. We discovered this as adolescents when we got our first car and learned that the **freedom** that afforded us ... demanded that we buy **gas** ... pay for **insurance** and thus ... horror of horrors ... get a **job**! It is an error to think that freedom is the ability to do whatever we want without cost.

For the Christian, freedom is the ability to be the unique person that God created each of us to be. Our freedom allows us to be our best selves. When we are truly free to be our true selves as God created us be ... we will not allow our weak and sinful human nature lead us into **another** slavery ... the slavery of the wisdom of the world ... which believes "I can do **what** I want **whenever** I want.". The Christian concept of freedom can **only** be understood with faith ... the faith that allows us to put **God** first and all the cares and concerns of the world a distant second ... the faith that allows us to discover and become what God's plan **calls** us to be. We have a perfect example of this kind of faith and commitment in our first reading.

Elijah the prophet was nearing the end of his life. God commanded him to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elisha ... a prosperous farmer ... was plowing in his field. (We can assume he was prosperous because few farmers could afford twelve yoke of oxen.) Elijah approached the farmer and threw his cloak over him ... symbolically investing him with the authority of a prophet. Elisha ... without **hesitation** ... slaughtered his oxen ... built a fire with the plowing equipment ... roasted the oxen over the fire ... served the meat to his neighbors ... took his leave of his family and followed Elijah as his apprentice. Elisha trusted God completely. He disposed of all his possessions so there was **no** turning back. In perfect freedom he had the grace, wisdom and courage to be who God called him to be.

In contrast we hear in the Gospel about some other would be disciples. They all want to follow Jesus ... but only after they take care of **other** things. For them following Jesus was a **lower** priority. Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." He wants His followers to follow Him and not look back to what ... or who ... they left behind. In true discipleship, there is no turning back.

Jesus invites each of us to follow Him. He has a plan for each and every one of us ... a plan we can only discern by quiet, thoughtful prayer ... carefully listening for what He may be trying to tell us. His mission for us may or may **not** require the **radical** sacrifices we hear about in our reading today, but it will surely always require **some** sacrifice.

So we need to ask ourselves if there is anything or anyone that ... is keeping us from wholeheartedly making Jesus the center of our lives? Are there **possessions** or perhaps a certain person ... or **people** ... that interfere with our relationship with our God? Are our choices of

entertainment compatible with discipleship? And ... most important ... *if* there are things in our lives that stand *between* us and the Lord ... and if we are *not* willing to give them up ... does that not mean ... that they are *more* important to us than God Himself? And as long as God does *not* come first ... that true *freedom* Paul speaks of can *never* be our own!