

First Impressions 13th SUNDAY -C-

I Kings 19: 16, 19-21 Psalm 16 Galatians 5: 1, 13-18 Luke 9: 51-62

By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

I read with embarrassment the response Elisha made when he was offered the opportunity to follow the great prophet Elijah. He was willing to give up a lot: he leaves his parents; he slaughters the twelve yoke of oxen; cooks them using the plowing equipment for fuel and gives the meat to the people to eat. Having said farewell to his parents, disposed of his earthly possessions---and it does sound like he was a man of means--- he leaves to follow Elijah. He has burned his bridges behind him; has given all to answer the call. I remember leaving home to enter the Dominicans. Before I did so I made sure to finish my B.A., “just in case” I needed a backup plan. I also carried a lot of interior baggage with me. I still do—lots of reservations, cautions and “what ifs?” To use Jesus’ image: I have set my hand to the plow; but looked to what was left behind.

But the same probably applies to most of us who claim to be followers of Christ. We know he is not asking us to leave family, property and home in quite the same way Elisha did. But there are sacrifices we know we must make if we are to be his followers; or if we are to truly, as the Psalm response encourages us, confess to God, “My Lord are you, O Lord, my allotted portion and my cup.” I hear Jesus’ invitation to those who want to follow him. He is inviting them to go with him to Jerusalem, a place of sacrifice for him and any who wish to be his disciples. No matter what our vocation, we have, in one way or another heard his call. It is, first of all, personal; it speaks to our own unique circumstances, no two people are called in the same way; no two respond exactly the same.

Maybe we first heard Jesus’ invitation a long time ago. Has his call to us grown old or stale? Has Jesus’ voice grown faint, a vague echo from some years ago, when we had more enthusiasm, energy, commitment or idealism? ... When we first chose tentatively to respond to God in our lives? Has the Word of God that was spoken to us at one time, stopped being able to renew and recreate? Do we not hear that call at this stage of our lives? We may be home caring for sick or elderly parents; a handicapped child; a spouse who suffered a stroke. Maybe we volunteered to help out in a program at our parish: to teach religious education; gather food for the poor; visit the sick; count the collection. Others of us heard a call to work in the broader community, on the civic stage: lobbying for social change; voicing the needs of the under classes; working to improve education; fighting for fair wages. If we are involved in these, or activities like them, then we heard a call at one time and we responded.

Did God issue that call, in whatever way we heard it, and then go off with plans to return at a later day to see how we did in our response? No, it is always a brand new and renewing call, always inviting a response and always asking again that we let go of baggage, put aside reservations and cynicism—burn whatever plows we must—and follow. Judging from the biblical stories we hear today and in so many others, the call comes in the ordinariness of our lives, along the road or, like Elisha, while we are plowing, busy about our day's work: teaching a class; waiting on tables; straightening our desk; turning on the computer; answering the phone; sitting at the reception desk; knitting for the missions. In one way or another we hear it again, "Follow me." In one way or another, it is very present tense. Does it suggest that we pause, listen for a moment, wonder what we must stop doing and how we can respond—again?

We adults have seen a lot in our lives. We are experienced in some of the rough parts of life. We have had promises broken, been betrayed and had our share of disillusionment. Yet, there is the trusting child within, the one who is willing to put his/her hand in the one who walked the road to Jerusalem, trust him and follow wherever he would lead. The call is not old, it is as new as this day, always inviting a response from trusting children whom, life has taught, don't have all the answers we once thought we had. We are not sure where we are being lead, but we know the one who is inviting us, and we know that we will be lead to a better place than we could have ever provided for ourselves.

This week we celebrate Independence day here in the States. The mystery we know to be absolutely true is that our response to Jesus' invitation to follow him involves us for the long haul and has and will require sacrifice. We also know that his call and our fidelity to it, is totally liberating it gives vision; focuses our energies and opens us to give ourselves generously and freely to the kingdom Christ came to proclaim through his words and deeds.

We come to a resting place at this Eucharist. We are hoping and asking at this celebration for a food that opens our hearts to generosity and joyful spontaneity. God is generous to us. In a way--- we have invited God to "Follow us," and God has responded by the gift of Jesus' total self-giving. He journeys with us each step of our way to Jerusalem.

A word about our usually neglected "fourth reading:" We preachers tend to overlook the Psalm Response to the first reading as a source for our preaching. Today's psalm consists of sections of Psalm 16, and, as usual, it is meant to respond or "play off" the first reading. This psalm falls under the category of a "psalm of confidence," and a section of it has been omitted so as to place emphasis on the central theme of confidence. While the selection we have starts with a plea for protection, the rest of the chosen verses (7-11) constitute a joyful song of trust. The

whole person (“heart,” “soul,” and “body”) resides in confidence of God’s protection. When things are going well it is easy to trust and be optimistic. But this is no disembodied psalm, abstracted from real life. There does seem to be a background atmosphere of danger or concern surrounding the psalmist that prompts this prayer, “...you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.” Don’t you wonder what situation is stirring the psalmist to pray in such a way? We may not know exactly what was threatening then, but none of us are strangers to testy situations in life that cause us to turn to God and at least try, to speak a prayer of trust and confidence in God’s abiding presence. If we are in one of these difficult moments now this psalm can provide us with words to voice to God. If we pray a psalm of confidence, even when we aren’t feeling that way, who knows, the prayer may give us the confidence we lack. The Word God is speaking to us and the Eucharist we will receive, assure us that our God does not leave us on our own. This faith enables us to pray such a prayer of trust, even in dire situations.

If not under immediate physical threat, then perhaps the psalmist is looking soberly at death. It is the force that we all will face and that can overwhelm us with fear and dread. What will happen to us when we die? We don’t know exactly, except that we are now and will be then, in God’s loving hands. We will not be abandoned “to the nether world”—the land of shadows. In Acts (2: 25-28), Luke alludes to this psalm to support faith in Jesus’ resurrection and to stir trust in our own.

Elisha has given up family and property to respond to God’s call and follow Elijah. What will Elisha have in the future? Psalm 16, the response to the I Kings’ reading, suggests that God is my “allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot.” Together we pray the Response today and express where our hope lies—securely with God. “You are my inheritance, O Lord.” Psalm 16 prompts us to make or renew our commitment to God who is our “inheritance.” We examine our lives to see if we have misplaced our energies and talents in other places and plans that have not taken God’s ways into consideration. Nothing, no God, no person, had claim over us as God does. With Jesus today we turn our face, “resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” Suffering awaits him and discipleship will also cost us. We pray at this Eucharist that Jesus gives us his Spirit so that like him, we can be single hearted in our service and make any changes we must to allow God to be our “inheritance.”

PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY

*Mary, our Mother and our Lady of Guadalupe, we come to you as migrants and pilgrims, passing briefly through this world, as we journey to our true home in heaven. **Show us the Way.***

*You were once a migrant too. Guide us along safe paths, protect us from evil, and free us from all fear. **Show us the Way.***

*Teach us to welcome the strangers among us - immigrants, migrants, refugees, people on the move -- all sisters and brothers on the journey. **Show us the Way.***

*Help us to seek justice for the oppressed, to bring comfort to the afflicted, and to offer hope and healing to all those we meet on the journey. **Show us the Way.***

*Help us to recognize that the only path to your Son is the way of justice. Strengthen us to make straight this way before him. **Show us the Way.***

*Open our hearts and minds to the suffering of victims of human trafficking, children held in detention, and other vulnerable persons in need of our hope and help in their time of struggle. **Amen.***

(USCCB), Social Justice Resources Diocese of Oakland mdoyle@oakdiocese.org

JUSTICE NOTES

"The whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."(Galatians 5:13-18)

"One Family Under God"

On this weekend when we celebrate and give thanks for the many blessings, which have come to us as a nation, it is important to remember, once again that we are a nation of immigrants.

For the past two years, our Catholic Bishops have said that our nation's immigration system is "broken and badly needs repair". They, along with some twenty Catholic organizations have been dedicated to a Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform named, ***Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope.***

"The U.S. Bishops are united in the view that the status quo is unacceptable and that comprehensive immigration reform is needed. We can no longer accept a situation in which some public officials and members of our communities scapegoat immigrants at the same time our nation benefits from their labor."

The Goals of the Campaign have been

- To educate Catholics and others of good will about immigration and the benefits to the nation;
- To strengthen public opinion about the positive contributions of immigrants;
- To advocate for just immigration laws which promote legal status and legal pathways for migrant workers and their families;
- To organize Catholic legal services networks to assist immigrants to access the benefits of reform;
- To change laws so that immigrants can support their families in dignity, families can remain united, and the human rights of all are respected.

What can I do?

Call or write your legislators and either thank them for supporting ***Comprehensive Immigration Reform*** or tell them how disappointed you are in their votes to defeat this issue of justice.

Open your heart and your mind to the plight of immigrants. Advocate on their behalf.

Spend some time reading the material at the Catholic Bishops' website: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/>

Pray for wisdom, for yourself and for our public officials who must make difficult and complicated decisions which affect so many in so many different ways.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"It is time to abandon the death penalty – not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners – to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person.

----- ("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to

one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "*People of Faith against the Death Penalty*." Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to...

- Jerry Cummings #0095361 (On death row since 11/11/97)
- Elrico Fowler #0134151 (11/14/97)
- Erroll Moses #0552017 (11/18/97)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C." The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and PDF) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer.

To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the "Year C-CD" button on the left and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).