

## Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 27, 2010

Responding to God's Call! 1 Kgs 19:16b,19-21 • Gal 5:1,13-18 • Lk 9:51-62

What did you choose for summer activities? Are you taking special time for family, special time for Mom and Dad, and special time with Grandparents? Are we also responding to God's call to spend time with God? Jesus responded to God by his determination to journey to Jerusalem. Jesus told the disciples in last week's gospel what awaited him. That he would be handed over, be crucified, and be raised on the third day. Jesus was very aware that he must do the will of his Father.

Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian in the Confessional Church in Nazi Germany who was also very determined to respond to God's call in his life. He dared to speak out against the policies of the Nazi party, which earned him a spot in a concentration camp. While in the camp, Bonhoeffer inspired the guards and then received permission to minister to fellow prisoners. He wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it he wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer was correct. The concentration camp was literally days away from liberation when Bonhoeffer was executed.

Paul tells us today that it was "for freedom that Christ set us free." But he adds a warning, "Stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." Freedom is important because it was given to us for a purpose. We were freed from sin so that we could have the freedom to choose God. Our decision to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, must be just that: a decision. It is a choice that has to be motivated by love for Christ. Without freedom, there can be no love. Unfortunately we too often use our freedom to choose to become slaves again. Slaves to the things of this world like materialism.

The first book of Kings, we hear of Elisha responding to God's call to be the prophet to succeed Elijah. Elijah's cloak served as a symbol of his prophetic office. Placing it on Elisha symbolized Elijah transferring his power and authority to Elisha. It is similar to the laying on of hands at ordination.

With this act, there was a transition in style and in the prophetic word from one man to the other, and this can be seen in their names. "Elijah" means "My God is the Lord." "Elisha" means "My God saves." Elijah had to remind Israel of who God is. Because the king had introduced idols and false gods, Elijah's ministry was to point God's people back to the God who had chosen them. The ultimate moment of his career was in a contest with the court prophets. Queen Jezebel's court prophets could not

light a sacrificial fire. Elijah ordered the sacrifice be drenched with water and then called upon God to send fire from heaven to ignite it. His prayer was answered and the sacrifice was totally consumed. (As a result, the queen had her court of 450 prophets executed because of the failure of their false god!)

Elijah proved that Israel's God was the true God. Succeeding Elijah, Elisha brought a complementary message that God will save people who have been abandoned by their kings. Both prophets emphasize an important component in our relationship with God. We must choose Him. We must respond to God's call. Without this conscious choice, we distance ourselves from God. Jesus even more than Elijah emphasized this choice as well.

Elijah's response to Elisha's request to kiss his mother and father goodbye sounds harsh, yet he didn't forbid the request. Prophets often said things through symbolic action, and Elisha is no exception. When the writer of Kings tells us that Elisha was plowing with 12 oxen, we learn that Elisha belonged to a very wealthy family. No one actually plowed with 12 oxen, but the symbol of the number 12 is important. It means that something is complete; thus, Elisha had it all. The act of burning the farm implements and cooking the oxen tells us that Elisha's choice to follow Elijah and become a prophet for God was so complete that he was ending his former life completely and devoting himself totally to serving God.

In Luke's Gospel, we see hints of the story of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah called down fire from heaven to prove God more powerful than the gods of Jezebel. When the disciples wanted to call down fire to prove who God is, Jesus told them no. Coercion is not how people will come to Jesus' message of love. Luke reminds us of Elisha's desire to kiss his parents goodbye, yet when asked a similar question, Jesus again said no. There can be no hesitation, no looking back. A decision must be made. We are to respond to God's call.

Jesus won our freedom so that we would be free to choose to follow Him or not. Our readings today tell us that responding to God's call may not be an easy choice. We can choose the things, the false gods of this world or we can choose the freedom offered by Christ. The reward is eternity with God. How are we responding to God's call?

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6-27-10