

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY
IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



Prayer

Psalm 89:2-3, 16-19

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance; they exult in your name all day long, and extol your righteousness.

For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Reading the Word

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16

One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. She said to her husband, "Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put

there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there.

He said, "What then may be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood at the door. He said, "At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son." She replied, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant."

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he

FIRST READING
2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16

PSALM

Psalm 89:2-3, 16-19

SECOND READING

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

GOSPEL

Matthew 10:37-42

lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

*Scripture quotations from
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Hearing the Word

“Fruits of Hospitality”

This Sunday’s readings share a common theme – hospitality – and they elaborate on the fruits produced by acts of openness and welcoming towards others.

The episode from the prophet Elisha’s ministry in the first reading narrates the story of hospitality shown to him by a Shunammite “woman of rank”, who must have been a wealthy person with ample material resources. She was also a sensitive and perceptive woman. Inviting the prophet to eat and even reside in her house, she demonstrated her ability to recognize him as “a holy man of God” and, together with her husband, she welcomed him into their home and their lives. This hospitality provoked the prophet’s response. First, Elisha called the woman and offered to recommend her to the local authorities, apparently regarding some business arrangement which might benefit her (cf. 2 Kgs 4:13). She refused that offer. When Elisha insisted on showing her kindness, his own servant, Gehazi, pointed out where the prophet’s intervention was truly needed – the woman had no children.

At that time, the Israelites believed that childlessness was a sign of a curse. The logic was that since children are God’s blessing, their lack meant God’s curse. Gehazi, saying that “she has no son

and her husband is old”, revealed all her hidden pain and the lack of hope or possibility for the removal of the alleged “curse” by human means. Nevertheless, Elisha, “the holy man of God” called the woman and announced that her barrenness will end, and she will bear a son. This promise was decisively stated by the prophet, with God’s authority behind his words, “at this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son”. Although the text of this reading ends with a skeptical response from the woman, the subsequent verses report that the promise came true; the woman conceived and bore a son. The prophet brought the blessing into the life of the family when, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible. This miraculous reversal of fortunes, and the prophetic action which caused it, was a response to the hospitality which the Shunammite woman had gratuitously shown.

The passage from the Letter to the Romans highlights the new situation of the members of the Christian community who embraced Christ. Paul counts himself among them, as he begins this passage with the phrase, “all of us”. This newness consists in being removed from living under the power and reign of sin, and brought into union with Christ through baptism. Paul develops his argument on the basis of the inner unity of each faithful person with Christ. This unity

was established through baptism, which Paul describes as immersion “into Christ’s death.” Using symbolic language, Paul refers to death as an act of complete separation from something. In this case being “dead to sin” means complete separation from sin and a new birth in Christ.

Christ’s physical death was followed by resurrection and new life. Those united with Christ through baptism will share the same fate. This unity with Christ’s death and burial implies a definitive separation from sin and its effects. There is a certain paradox here. Normally, death results in definitive separation from life and from others. But the death which Paul symbolically speaks about has positive effects. Death with Christ in baptism, separates the faithful from sin, which sin would have separated a person from God. Positively, “being dead to sin” leads to being joined to Christ and God, and being “alive for God in Christ Jesus”. Thus, union with Christ in baptism means dying to sin and rising to life for God and for Jesus.

However, it must be noted that this process can take place because believers have been welcomed “into Christ”. The gift of life eternal is given to those who are “in Christ”. Christ’s offer extended to believers is an example of extreme “hospitality”. Christ welcomes former sinners, separated from himself and

his Father, to be joined to himself in order to bring them to a life giving union with God.

The Gospel text concludes the “missionary discourse” of Jesus in Matthew ch. 10. In his final remarks, Jesus stresses the necessity of preferring him even more than one’s closest family, in order to become his disciple and to be “worthy” of him. Love for Jesus supersedes family bonds.

For the first time in Matthew’s Gospel at Matt 10:18, the word “cross” appears, and is immediately identified as an essential component of discipleship. Those who, like Jesus, sacrifice their lives for the sake of God’s kingdom, will become like him and will find life eternal. The profound message here is that life is a gift of God, but, paradoxically, a disciple can fully receive that gift only by making his or her own life a gift.

Another important message of this conclusion points to the importance of openness, and receptiveness to God’s message, and his messengers, and the importance of extending hospitality to them. The passage speaks about welcoming Christ’s disciples, prophets and upright persons. These groups were the various types of God’s messengers and missionaries active at the beginnings of the Church. Matthew states that every act of welcome and support to such

emissaries, even as small a thing as giving “a cup of cold water”, will receive a reward from the Father himself (cf. Matt 6:1). Renouncing one’s earthly life for Jesus leads to full union with him. Welcoming those who are united with him leads to unity with God himself. The result of that unity is the greatest gift – eternal life.

Today’s readings show the direct link between hospitality and life. Elisha brought new life to a barren family in response to their hospitality. Paul confirmed that eternal life stems from being invited and welcomed by Christ to join him by being “baptized into his death”. In the final words of his missionary discourse Jesus instructed the disciples to offer their lives completely in the service of the mission. To receive the true benefits of that mission a person must welcome the missionaries and their message. Hospitality is an act of opening oneself to God’s gifts and blessings carried by those whom God sends. Thus, the practice of hospitality leads to a life of blessedness, as affirmed by the Psalmist: “Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance”.

Listening to the Word of God

In many family homes in Africa there is a special cupboard where the best cups, plates and glasses are kept for “visitors only” purposes.

I remember as a child the excitement that filled our home when visitors came. Not only did they receive the best plates and glasses, but it was also an opportunity to eat special dishes that were not part of our everyday menu. The visitor transformed our home, filling it with excitement and anticipation. Even without the presence of visitors, hospitality was expressed in ensuring that the pot of food was not empty. A small portion was reserved for the unexpected stranger or visitor.

Hospitality was also expressed in sharing resources with neighbours in need. I remember as a child being sent to ask neighbours for ingredients or food items that we had run short of, such as salt, sugar, or oil. Similarly, neighbours would do the same when they needed food or cooking ingredients. Such sharing created bonds of solidarity in our communities. I know that this is true in most communities across the world.

In another custom from my home, the dish containing the food that was borrowed was never returned empty but always with something special in it! This exchange of goods and daily neighbourly hospitality and generosity strengthened relationships and provided a safety net and a sense of security within the community. These values of interdependence, justice, solidarity, and love constitute the fundamental principle of many, if not most, cultures

on our planet. In African cultures, we find a common concept of “Ubuntu”. To be human is to possess, embody and practice Ubuntu. In the spirit of Ubuntu, one’s family is not limited to biological parents and siblings but to all who belong to the human family. Hospitality, therefore, is not just about actions but defines what it means to be a person. I remember growing up and referring to all the women and men who were the same age as my parents as “mothers and fathers”, and young people of my age or older or younger as brothers and sisters. The hospitality of Ubuntu therefore extended the family to include everyone.

Sadly, Ubuntu and similar practices and concepts around the world are under threat from the newly emerging global lifestyle with its values of individualism, nuclear family, independence, privacy and “minding one’s own business”. To achieve success in today’s world means holding on to everything that one has, such as talent, money, family and protecting it at all costs. Even as Christians, we can easily be influenced by this way of thinking, and invest solely in our own security and well-being. There is nothing wrong with sound financial investment and savings, with self-development. And yet when they absorb our lives and stop us from being hospitable, generous and open to others, then we have missed opportunities to encounter Jesus through the lives of

strangers, and those in need. In the Gospel Jesus makes a radical revelation of his presence in the world through our openness to people, sharing gladly that which costs us the most, namely our time, love, resources and friendship.

Proverb

“The arrival of a guest is a blessing”

Action

Self-examination

Am I a hospitable person?
How do I show it?

What do I feel when circumstances compel me to share something – resistance or joy? What does my reaction reveal about myself and my perception of others?

Response to God

God embodies generosity in everything from the bounty of creation to the most important gift of Jesus. I will express my prayerful gratitude to God for his boundless generosity in sharing his life with us.

Response to your World

I will take seriously today’s message on hospitality and decide on a way to exercise it in my daily dealings with the world.

Fear of others and worries about the future can cause us to “protect what is ours” at all costs. We will take steps to break this pattern by deciding on a way to show generosity and hospitality to those who would benefit most from our openness.

Prayer

Lord God, may the witness of your generosity through creation, and above all through Jesus, inspire us to live and embody hospitality in our world, which is so desperate for love.

May we offer and share a welcoming embrace, forgiveness, food, shelter, justice and dignity. Amen.