

The cost of discipleship

This theme carries on from last week

Our natural fear of hardships

Even our fear of death

These are overcome in baptism

And it is through baptism that we become disciples

Putting others first in our lives

Like the woman in our first reading

We know the location this took place

But we are not given the name of either the woman or her husband

She is an influential woman

She recognizes Elisha as a man of God

And she persuades him to dine with her and her husband

Eventually she prepares a guest room for him

Elisha is moved to repay her generosity

Rather than her faith

Elisha ask his servant if there is anything she needs

He is told she has no son

And is getting on in years

So Elisha calls her

He tells her that in a year's time she will have a son

A reward for her kindness to a prophet

For Christians, this discipleship continues

And as for the woman

Sacrifices are called for

Our Gospel looks at the demands and rewards of following Christ

Jesus gives us 3 examples of the cost of discipleship

The first two are centered around family

Whoever loves his father or mother more than me

Is not worthy of me

Whoever loves son or daughter more than me

Is not worthy of me

For most of us

Family is the number one concern in our lives

The familial bond is central to family life

To our society and culture

And yet Christ insists these take second place to him

He is not telling us they are not important

It is just about priorities

This is indeed a demanding statement

St Augustine can help us here

He had a great devotion to his mother, St Monica

In fact it was Monica's prayers that brought about his own conversion

He tells us: *I will love you in Christ, not instead of Christ*

You will be with me in him

But I will not be with you without him

This is taking up our cross every day

Sacrificing our self-sufficiency

Sacrificing our independence

Sacrificing our ego

Sacrificing ourselves

This is a rude shock and a gamble

And in order to embrace this sacrifice

We need to recognize the fact that we are called by another

There is a goal beyond that of this world

Another reality from above and beyond

Recognizing this

And pursuing it

This is at the heart of Christianity

To do this will bring rewards

Some in this life

And most importantly, eternal life

Whoever receives you receives me

Whoever receives a prophet

Receives a prophet's reward

And whoever gives a cup of water to one of these

Because he is a disciple of mine

He will surely not lose his reward

Christ is telling us we do not necessarily need to do great and grand things

Something so simple as giving a cup of water to another

Doing small things with great love

This is the path of discipleship

A discipleship we are born into on the day of our baptism

As St Paul tells us

Through our baptism

We are baptized into Christ's death

It is through the power of baptism

That we can face our number one fear

Death

There is only 1 person who has ever definitively died and returned

That is Christ

Yes, there are many who have been declared dead and revived

But this is not the same thing

They will die again

And their death does not lead to our salvation

But Christ's death is different

His death leads to his resurrection

And this destroyed death itself

When we are baptized into his death

We are baptized into his life

This is the beginning of Christian life

This is why we have the body of Christ on our crucifixes

To remind us that this is not the end

But the beginning of life

In baptism we enter new life

That is the meaning of pouring water over the head

Or better yet, what is done in some cultures

Total immersion

When the newly baptized is under water they cannot breathe

A symbol of death

And when they come up into the air

New life

This is not a morbid fascination with death

Not a pre-occupation with it

It is a statement to the world

A statement that the worst thing you can throw at us, death itself

This has no power over us

And that brings freedom

We are no longer enslaved by false gods

Trying to fill ourselves with power, pleasure, money

All things that ultimately leave us empty

On his cross Christ took human pleasure, friendship and honor

He emptied them of their lies

And destroyed them

And he gives us what makes life worth living

Forgiveness, compassion, love, mercy

Letting go of the things holding us back

Embracing the things that bring life

This is the cost of discipleship

Prioritizing things

Even good things such as family

Mother, father, son, daughter, spouse

Social status, relationships

Even the love of self

Not allowing any of these to become gods in themselves

But allowing them to be pathways to God

Allowing us to live in true freedom

Stripped clean of any worldly illusions or means

Baptized into his death

So we might live in his newness of life