

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings speak to us about the nature of discipleship and its inherent cost. The summons of Elisha to succeed the prophet Elijah reflects two significant aspects of the call to discipleship. Elisha is tending the flock in a rather ordinary, routine way. Indeed, God calls each us to service within the context of our experience and circumstances. Another important aspect of the Lord summoning us to service is the preconditions we often place on that call. Elisha when called by Elijah tells him that he first has to say goodbye to his parents - and then and only then - is he free to answer the prophetic call to follow Elijah. It is a natural part of our human condition to say our "goodbyes" and to make sure that our affairs are in order before embarking on a move or change. Yet, the response of Elijah in the Book of Kings and Jesus in Luke's Gospel is essentially the same: surrender yourself and follow the Lord. There is often the desire to listen to and follow what the Lord is inviting us to enter into but also the congruent conditions we place on that desire.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus invites a disciple to come and follow him. The man clearly wants to be a companion of Jesus but also understands he has family obligations and responsibilities he must meet. "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." The response of Jesus can seem rather cold: "Let the dead bury their dead." In its proper perspective, the response of Jesus points to a level of freedom and detachment. Yes, there will always be things that need to get done. However, if the Lord is calling us to service, we have to trust in that call, surrender ourselves, let go and submit generously and with freedom to God's will for us.

The call to mission, given to us by Baptism, compels us to "go and proclaim the kingdom of God." We cannot proclaim the good news of salvation if we are tethered or bogged down by too many worldly distractions or limitations. St. Paul knew this reality in a very profound way. Once imprisoned himself by the preoccupations of vanity, power and pride, he was set free from slavery by a conversion of heart. That conversion allowed him to hear the voice of Christ calling him to a more excellent way...a way of freedom rooted in love. Paul spoke with authority and credibility when he exhorted the Galatians when he instructed them:..."you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love." Thus, freedom in the Christian context draws us away from a disposition of selfishness and self-absorption towards rendering service to others. It also enables us, through much grace and the Holy Spirit, to a level of detachment that frees us to serve the Kingdom.

Luke's Gospel describes Jesus's response to two followers who ask to defer their service for noble and righteous reasons. Yet, Jesus does challenge them. The second man says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Jesus responds, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." This is a very difficult proposition for us to accept yet it is essential to living in spiritual freedom. May we, through prayer and the nourishment of the Eucharist, seek to let go and allow the Lord to work most fully through our lives of generosity, service, forgiveness, and love.

Fr. Tom