

To Follow You Nearly



I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (1 Kgs 19:16, 19-21)

Mission of Elijah: to anoint Jehu and Elisha

¹⁶The Lord said to Elijah, “You shall also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, as king of Israel, and **Elisha**, son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, as prophet to succeed you”.^b

“Anointing” of Elisha

^{19*} Elijah set out, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak on him.

Elisha bids good bye to loved ones and follows Elijah

²⁰Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, “Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you.” Elijah answered, “Go back! What have I done to you?” ²¹Elisha left him and, taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to the people to eat. Then **he left and followed Elijah** to serve him.

THE FOCUS: Elisha follows Elijah

COMMENTARY

- In the whole context of the liturgy this Sunday, the Reading should be understood in terms of discipleship. Elisha follows Elijah.
- However, we can also focus on the process of succession. The prophet Elijah (= My God is Yahweh) is about to go and Elisha (=God is salvation) has to succeed him.
- Before Elisha functions as a prophet, he has to learn from Elijah. God needs prophets to speak before the kings of Israel.
- V.16 tells that the prophet Elijah anoints King Jehu (842-815 BCE). God through the prophet has power over kings of Israel.

- V.19 indicates that Elisha is a farmer, plowing the field. 12 yokes of oxen = heavy equipment, like a bulldozer in our time. Elisha is a rich farmer.
- “Throwing his cloak over him” is the transfer of prophetic power to Elisha. No actual anointing (with oil) is indicated.
- In v.20, Elisha responds to the call and leaves his animals and ask permission to say good bye to his loved ones.
- V.21 describes in vivid terms how he responds: slaughters oxen and uses the yoke for fuel and throw a party to the people. Goodbye to material security and loved ones!
- Elisha then follows Elijah.

REFLECTIONS

God can call you in the peak of your career.

God calls Elisha when he is plowing the field, handling 12 oxen (more powerful than 12 horses).

Elisha must have been a rich man. (We may suppose, he owns those animals and even large tracts of land. He is not a tenant because later on he disposes of them).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11) YOU ARE MY INHERITANCE, O LORD.

SECOND READING (Gal 5:1,13-18)

Freedom vs. slavery

^{1*} *a* For **freedom** Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.*

^{13*} *j* For you were called for **freedom**, brothers.

Warning against abuse of freedom

But do not use this **freedom** as an opportunity for the flesh;

True use of freedom

rather, serve one another through love.* ^{14*}For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

What abusers of freedom do

¹⁵But if you go on biting and devouring one

another, beware that you are not consumed by one another.

Spirit vs. flesh/law

¹⁶I say, then: **live by the Spirit** and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.* ^{17m}For the flesh has desires against the **Spirit**, and the **Spirit** against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. ¹⁸ⁿBut if you are guided by the **Spirit**, you are not under the law.

THE FOCUS: Freedom through the Spirit

COMMENTARY

- In this letter to the Galatians, Paul at length discusses the freedom Christ gives to the believers. He considers the teaching of the rabbis (works of the law) as yoke of slavery.
- Paul’s teaching is: In Christ, there is freedom. In the law (Torah), there is no freedom. No freedom if one lives in the flesh.
- In v.1, Paul says Christ leads us to freedom. Christians are free from the law and there should be no backsliding to the law (yoke of slavery).
- V.13 says Christian vocation is to be free.
- Now freedom is not free to contradict itself. It is not licentiousness (living in the flesh). Freedom should not be abused. Freedom should lead us to serve and love one another (v.14).
- In v.15, Paul specifies what is to live in the flesh: biting and devouring (*taking advantage of each other; acting like savage beasts*).
- Vv.16-18 introduce a new expression: living by the Spirit. It is contrasted with the desire of the flesh (lust, this time it has nothing with the law).
- Spirit and flesh stand in opposition to each other. Living in the Spirit (guided by the Spirit) is a sign of not living under the law (v.18).
- Here, there is an interplay (or mix up) of the important opposing concepts: slavery vs. freedom, Spirit vs. flesh.
- What is clear here is: Christ, freedom, Spirit, service, love go together.
- The law, yoke of slavery, flesh, abuse of freedom, biting, devouring, desire of the flesh go together.

REFLECTIONS

If we live in Christ, we live in freedom.

But freedom is not license to do whatever we want. It is not licentiousness. Freedom is life-giving, life-enhancing.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 9:51-62)

Context of Journey

^{51* a} When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to **journey** to Jerusalem,* ^{52* b}and he sent messengers ahead of him. On the way they entered a Samaritan village to

prepare for his reception there,⁵³but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem. ^{54e}When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?”⁵⁵Jesus turned and rebuked them,⁵⁶and they journeyed to another village.

The Cost of Discipleship

^{57* d}As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, “**I will follow** you wherever you go.”⁵⁸Jesus answered him, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.”⁵⁹And to another he said, “**Follow me.**” But he replied, “[Lord,] let me go first and bury my father.”⁶⁰But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead.* But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”^{61e}And another said, “**I will follow** you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.”⁶²[To him] Jesus said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”

THE FOCUS: Following the Journey of Jesus

COMMENTARY

- Our text describes the beginning of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. Luke has a very long journey narrative of Jesus compared with Matthew and Mark.
- In v.51 “for his being taken up” means his ascension. Jesus’ ascension into heaven begins with his journey to Jerusalem (where he will die). Note important words: “he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” (No one can stop / distract him.)
- In v .52, as usual he sends advance party to prepare the people to receive him.
- In v. 53, the Samaritans do not accept him. Reason: he is going to Jerusalem.
- In v. 54, the named disciples, James and John want to invoke punishment upon Samaria. (These two followers show violent feelings, want to replicate Sodom and Gomorrha).
- In v. 55, Jesus rebukes them; they go another village. (Here it is presumed they are accepted. Not all Samaritan villages are against Jesus).
- Vv.57-62 describe what happens on the way. Three “disciples-to-be” encounter with Jesus.
- The first and the third volunteer to follow, saying “I will follow you.” The second is invited.
- Jesus answers with the first cost of discipleship: nowhere to lay one’s head, no comfort, no security of family and loved ones, exposure to bad elements and hostility, coming out into the open, vulnerable.



- Jesus' second answer: To follow him, Jesus does not allow delay. Mission is urgent. Jesus is on the go. You may not find him anymore, after you bury your dead.
- Jesus' answer to the third: indicates that in discipleship, there is no looking back.

REFLECTIONS

Jesus is very strict here on the urgency of mission.

When Elisha wanted to bid good bye to his parents, Elijah allowed him. For Jesus, following him entails immediate action, no dilly dallying.

To be a disciple, one must journey with Jesus (*hindi magpapaiwan*).

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading is the call of Elisha as disciple of Elijah.

The Second Reading is about living in Christ. This is the essence of Christian discipleship.

The Gospel Reading is about the cost of discipleship.

How to develop your sharing / homily

Relate how you became a disciple or a student of a famous person, good priest, good bishop, astute businessman, good motivational speaker, good professor, good preacher.

What did you do to become a good disciple?

I read his notes, books. I listened to his talks. I attended his seminars, his classes. I bought the tapes and CDs.

We want to follow a great teacher that should inspire us, give us some light and meaning to our lives.

Yet we should also know how to be a good follower or disciple.

The liturgy for this Sunday is about discipleship.

The First Reading tells us how to be a good disciple. We give up our job, our work, our family and loved ones and follow a teacher. Elisha gives up everything and follows Elijah. Elisha learns how to prophesy through Elijah.

The Second Reading tells us whom to follow. It tells us that we should follow Jesus Christ. Following is living in Christ. We have freedom; we live in Spirit, not in the flesh (material and sinful world)

The Gospel Reading tells us the cost of discipleship.

The disciple must give up one's comfort zone.

The disciple must not delay in responding. One must give up one's delaying tactics. One must give priority to the mission or else one will be left behind.

The disciple must always be consistent and decisive. If you have said yes to the Lord, don't take your word back. The disciple must give up one's personal agenda in favor of Jesus.

Are we true followers of Jesus? What keeps us from being disciples of Jesus? Negatively, what do we learn from the Readings?

Refusal to give up (modify) our routine and learn from the Master (*First Reading*).

Being distracted by false teachings, images of Christ, not the real Christ in the New Testament (*Second Reading*).

Too little knowledge about what it entails to be a disciple of Jesus (sacrifice). Jesus warns he has "nowhere to lay his head." When the going gets hard and rough, all complaints and protests (*Gospel*). This kind of disciple will fall out. Jesus does not want this kind.

Too much attachment to one's own time, place, name, phase, attitude, character, values (*Gospel*).

Too attached to one's old history, to the past. (*Gospel*)

If we are not true disciples (*not mentored by assigned / authorized teachers, not attending ongoing formation, not wanting to be disturbed in our routines, not living in Christ but in sin and no freedom, insisting on our convenience and attachments, humihirit pa, making bawi [taking back] our commitment*), we cannot journey with Jesus Christ.

Jesus is always on a journey. His disciples too.

We are a pilgrim church, appropriating nothing, claiming nothing (no time, no place, no security). True disciples are radically uprooted from the material world and concentrate on following the footsteps of Jesus.

We are still learners. We are journeying with Jesus through the "signs of the times."

We stand at the service of the kingdom of God. "No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

We do not dictate what to do in our own terms, but we discern with our co-journeymers.

The eucharist is our food and nourishment in our journey towards the kingdom of God. We are strengthened by the body and blood of Jesus in the forms of bread and wine, a superb example of self-giving to us.

Participation in the eucharist and the reception of the holy communion are signs of our willingness to journey with Jesus, to follow his footsteps no matter where he goes and leads us, even up to Calvary.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. What do you think are the blocks to our authentic discipleship? Discuss among yourselves.

2. In our parish, what are the ways by which we can lead other people to come closer to God?

3. From a musical, the song Day by Day goes: "Oh dear Lord, three things I pray: To see you more clearly follow you more nearly,