

## **Synopsis of OT XIII [C] (June 26) Homily on Luke 9: 51-62 (L/16)**

**Introduction:** Today's readings are about God's call and man's commitment in answer to that call. They ask for total commitment in total freedom with the spirit of patient love, saying an unconditional "Yes" to Jesus and to the Christian life as a true disciples of Christ.

Scripture lessons:The first reading describes how Elisha committed himself whole-heartedly to answer God's call to be a prophet, in spite of his initial hesitation when God called him through the prophet Elijah. The Responsorial Psalm, (Psalm 16), offers us the refrain, "*You are my inheritance, O Lord.*" This Psalm has traditionally been used to exemplify commitment to the ordained ministry or to religious profession. But it more accurately reflects the commitment made by all Christians in their Baptism. The second reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Galatians, reinforces the commitment message of the first reading and the Responsorial Psalm; Paul warns that true freedom is not meant to be a license for self-indulgence, but as a way to show God and human beings our commitment to God and to His service.

The first part today's Gospel is Jesus' teaching on Christian tolerance, given after he had observed the angry response of two of his apostles. James and John were angry and asked Jesus to destroy the Samaritans by bringing down fire from Heaven when they refused to receive Jesus as a prophet and give him hospitality as he travelled through Samaria to Jerusalem. In the second part of today's Gospel, Luke introduces three potential disciples who offered lame reasons that made Jesus' call to ministry "impossible" for them to accept, after Jesus had told them plainly what the commitment required and the cost involved. They were found unfit and unprepared to follow Jesus as his disciples. We too, are asked to follow Jesus, totally and immediately, without any reservation both by giving priority to him and to his cause and by surrendering our lives to God in humble and dedicated service to others.

Life messages:As Christians, we should have the courage of our convictions **to honor our commitments:** a) The marriage

commitment. The spouses are expected to honor their marriage commitment, that is, to remain in mutual love and respect till their death and to raise their children to be zealous Christians. b) The priestly and religious commitment: Priests, Deacons and religious should honor the commitment they have made to obey their lawful superiors, to keep their vows and to spend their lives serving God's people faithfully. c) The Christian commitment: As Christians, all of us should honor our Baptismal commitment: to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, to obey his law of love and to bear witness to him through ideal and transparent Christian lives.

### **OT XIII (June 26): I Kgs 19:16b, 19-21; Gal 5:1, 13-18; Lk 9: 51-62**

Anecdotes: # 1: *The Cost of Discipleship*: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran theologian, wrote a series of reflections on the Sermon on the Mount entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he maintained that discipleship requires that we make a fundamental decision to follow Jesus and to accept the consequences of that decision. His own religious convictions led him to stand up to the tyranny of Nazi Germany and to participate in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. The plot was uncovered, Bonhoeffer was apprehended, and the ultimate "cost" of discipleship was exacted of him: he was hanged by the Nazis on April 9, 1945. While discipleship might force some people to decide between life and death, few of us will be asked to pay that ultimate price. But today's Gospel challenges us to live in a certain way imitating the prophetic vocation of Jesus ([Dianne Bergant](#), C. S. A.).

# 2: The cost of discipleship: The Indian Epics narrate many amazing stories about the dedication of the disciples to their masters. The story of Ekalavya in Mahabharata is such an amazing one. Ekalavya is introduced as a young prince. He lived near the ashram of Drona, where Pandavas princes and Kaurava princes used to take lessons in various arts. He had great desire to learn the art of archery from Dronacharya. But Drona would not accept him as his disciple. But the boy was not to

be put off; his determination knew no bounds. Ekalavya went off into the forest where he fashioned a clay statue of Drona. Worshipping the statue as his preceptor, he began a disciplined program of self-study. As a result, Ekalavya became an archer of exceptional prowess. One day while Ekalavya was practicing, he heard a dog barking. Ekalavya fired seven arrows in rapid succession to fill the dog's mouth without injuring it. The Princes were surprised. They asked him who his master was. He replied that His "Guru" was Dronacharya. When Drona heard of it he went to see his unknown disciple. He found Ekalavya diligently practicing archery. Seeing Drona, Ekalavya prostrated himself and clasped the teacher's hands, awaiting his order. Drona asked Ekalavya for his Gurudakshina, the deed of gratitude a student owed his teacher upon the completion of his training. Ekalavya replied that there was nothing he would not give his teacher. Drona said, "Give me your right thumb." Without hesitation he cut off his right thumb and handed it to Drona. Today's readings speak to us about the cost of discipleship. (Fr. Bobby)

# 3: Commitment of Mormon missionaries: Many of us have seen Mormon missionaries riding their bicycles, wearing dark pants, white shirts and ties. Let me tell you more about their life-style. They do not see their families during the two years of their mission service. They are allowed to call home only on Christmas and Mother's Day. Their day begins at 6:30 AM with an hour of Bible study and prayer. Then they work until 9:30 PM. They have about an hour to do laundry and study Scripture before lights out. This is their schedule six days per week. No TV or movies or dates for two years. We have seen young men with multi-million dollars pro basketball contracts put all that on hold until they fulfill their mission obligation. Although I have some serious and fundamental theological differences with the Mormons, I can't deny the commitment of their young missionaries. Perhaps that commitment is a key reason why their numbers are growing so rapidly in the United States. Today's readings are about God's call and the commitment expected from us to answer that call.

# 4: On Christian tolerance:The best commentary on the first part of today's Gospel is a story about Abraham Lincoln, who was the finest and most spiritual of all the American presidents. During the Civil War, Lincoln was often criticized for not being severe enough on the soldiers of the South. On one occasion after a battle, a general from the North asked him, "Why didn't you destroy the enemy when you had the chance? President Lincoln answered with words adapted from the today's Gospel passage: "*Do I not destroy my enemy by making him my friend?*" That is exactly what Jesus tells us in today's Gospel: destroy our enemies by making them our friends. No doubt the feelings of anger and resentment run deep in many hearts today, and we wouldn't mind if people who hurt us deeply were punished or suffered from bad luck. Jesus, however, says: "*That is not my Spirit*" -- let Me heal your heart.

Introduction:Today's readings are about God's call and man's answering that call with commitment. The first reading describes how Elisha committed himself whole-heartedly to answer God's call to be a prophet, in spite of his initial hesitation when God called him through the prophet Elijah. The Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 16), offers us the refrain, "*You are my inheritance, O Lord.*" The Psalm has traditionally been used to exemplify commitment to the ordained ministry or to religious profession. But it more accurately reflects the commitment made by all Christians in their Baptism. The second reading, from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, reinforces the commitment message of the first reading and the Responsorial Psalm. In today's Gospel, Luke introduces some potential disciples who offered a variety of reasons as to why Jesus' call to ministry was "impossible" for them to accept. By analyzing their excuses and Jesus' responses to them, each of us is challenged to examine to what extent the alibis we offer to escape responsible ministry in the Church have any merit. We, too, are asked to follow Jesus totally and immediately, without any reservation, by giving up everything we have and surrendering our lives to God in the service of others.

**The first reading: I Kings 19: 16b, 19-21:** Elijah was able to preach to kings and overcome the false prophets, until Queen, Jezebel, became angry with him (1 Kings 18-19.) Then he fled the kingdom and returned to the Lord to resign his commission. But God did not accept his resignation. Instead, He told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor and co-worker. In the early history of salvation, the “mission” of being a Prophet was passed on from one prophet to another. Sometimes the prophet had a token or symbol of his ministry. In the case of Elijah, this was a cloak, which he threw over Elisha. [When he was being taken up in the fiery chariot, Elijah would pass that cloak on to Elisha.] Elisha’s response was, “Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you.” Elijah replied, in effect, “Why are you giving *me* excuses? I’m not the One calling you!” Elisha accepted the rebuke, and to show his repentance and total commitment to God’s call, he slaughtered the twelve yoke of oxen he had been using for his plowing, cooked their flesh (using the yoke and harness as fuel), and gave the meat as a meal for those who depended upon him. Elisha then became Elijah's successor – left everything behind him and committed himself to his prophetic role. In the Church, the ministry of prophecy is not reserved to a few but is a commission for all those who are reborn into Christ. When at Baptism the priest anoints those to be baptized, he announces: "I anoint you as priest, prophet, and king." This is to remind us that our prophetic mission consists in our becoming God's voice in our community and in our society. We are to be the conscience of the community. Where we see injustice in our community, in our society, in our families and especially in our own selves, we are compelled by our Baptism to change our own conduct, and if necessary, to raise our voice in God's Name, so that God's word may be made present at every moment.

**The second reading: Gal 5: 1, 13-18:** In his letter to the Christians in Galatia, Paul reminds all ministers of the Good News that the criterion by which they are to measure themselves is the very Spirit of God. Paul also clarifies that true freedom consists in our being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ and in listening to the voice of God. Paul

says: *“Do not use your freedom, brothers and sisters, as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, use it to serve one another through love.”* We begin to be free when we begin the process of commitment. Our freedom is realized only when we give ourselves away in love. Instead of living a life of self-indulgence, one who follows Jesus accepts a ministry of service that is rooted in loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Christian freedom may be defined like this: “I am my commitment to God. I will live my commitment, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, until I die.” Paul seems rather exasperated at having to remind his hearers of the obvious: living the new life of freedom in the Spirit means abandoning the old ways of sin. The "lust of the flesh" should be understood not only in a sexual sense, but as referring to all worldly impulses that are opposed to true love of neighbor.

Exegesis:Rejection by the Samaritans: Today’s Gospel passage deals with the beginning of Jesus’ journey from the northern towns of Galilee to the southern city of Jerusalem through the land of Samaria. Jesus encountered obstacles both from prospective disciples, who wanted to postpone their commitment until a more convenient time, and from the Samaritans. The Jews and Samaritans shared a common origin in the twelve tribes of Israel. But they hated each other and refused to intermingle or intermarry because of a long-standing historic conflict between the two nations dating back to the eighth century BC, after the Assyrian conquest of the Jews. Even under Assyrian rule, the Samaritans claimed to have maintained proper worship in their land with Mount Gerizim as the center of their religious life. They argued that the Jews were the ones who had compromised their religious beliefs during their Babylonian exile. The Jews, on the other hand, with the Temple of Jerusalem as the center of their religious life, accused Samaritans of having lost their religious and racial identity through intermarriage with their pagan neighbors. They even considered Samaritans as heretical and false worshipers of the God of Israel, and detested them far more than they detested the pagans. To get to Jerusalem, Galileans had either to go through Samaria or to take a longer, more difficult route east of the Jordan River. Jesus chose the shortcut through Samaria. But the

Samaritans both refused to honor Jesus as a prophet, and violated the sacred duties of hospitality. This infuriated the apostles and two of them, James and John, asked Jesus if he wanted them to command fire to come down from Heaven and consume the Samaritans as Elijah had done in his day (II Kings 1:9-12). Jesus rebuked them, however, because he was not a destroyer but a Savior with a message of mercy and love.

The call and excuses: The response of Jesus to the three would-be followers, described in the second part of today's Gospel, (vv 57-62), exemplifies the wholehearted constancy and sacrificial ministry that the Christian mission requires. We are surprised at Jesus' sharp response to the first man's willing discipleship. Undoubtedly, Jesus saw more deeply into the man's heart than we can. Jesus is simply honest about the demands and the cost of a commitment we might make too lightly and a journey we might undertake too easily. "*Let the dead bury their dead*": This response may sound too harsh. But this man's father was not dead or sick. He simply wished to stay with his father until his death. Jesus knew that later he would find another reason to delay the call. Jesus did not want another would-be follower to go home and bid farewell to his dear ones. Hence, Jesus rebukes him saying that the plowman must look ahead rather than back. Looking back while plowing causes crooked lines in the field. We see classical cases of initial reluctance and lame excuses in accepting God's call from Moses (Exodus 3: 1, 4: 10), Gideon (Judges 6: 15), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6: 5). Hence, we should be slow to condemn those who offer excuses in the service of the Lord; we need to offer them proper motivation, support, and encouragement.

Life messages:1)We need to honor our marriage commitment. As in the case of Elisha and the apostles, our commitment becomes our life. But today, more than ever, people make commitments too easily and then break them. This is the age of the lack of true commitment. The problem today is not that people are living together without being married; the problem is that they do not have the courage to *make* the commitment of marriage. In recent years, the age of marriage has

increased by more than three years in the West, that is, more than 10%. Modern people find many excuses for delaying marriage: “Well, let’s get good jobs and financial security first.” Another familiar excuse is: “I want to be free to come and go as I please!” Another excuse for delaying marriage is: “Let’s live together first. We’ll see if we’re compatible!” But the fact is that the longer unmarried couples live together, the more they experience their incompatibility!

2) We need to pray to solve the crisis in priestly commitment. We all know there is a tremendous shortage of priests and religious men because our young people are unwilling to make commitments to God by committing themselves to life-long celibacy, to a diocese or to the vowed life of a religious community. The argument, “I don’t want to make that commitment because I don’t want to give everything away,” shows an incorrect notion of Christian freedom. We begin to be free only when we start the process called commitment, and our freedom is realized only when we give ourselves away in love. Unfortunately, like those three would-be followers, a lot of our youngsters are still confused and ill-prepared for any kind of mission for their lives. As a result, they become adept at evading Christ’s call to discipleship.

3) We are invited to a Christian life of patient love. The first part of today’s Gospel gives us the greatest passage in the Bible concerning tolerance, which is really patient love, our “bearing with” one another. Quick anger over little incidents flares up all the time – between parents and children, in the workplaces between co-workers and in the neighborhood between neighbors. Very often the anger explodes over nothing. The Spirit of Jesus is opposed to such feelings. Although Elijah called down the fires of God from Heaven to wipe out the four hundred prophets of Baal, Jesus refused to have fire cast on the Samaritans who refused him entry. Hence, let us have this beautiful prayer in our hearts and on our lips: “*Create in me a clean heart. O God, and put a new and a right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of loving.*”

4) We need to pray for strength to honor all our commitments. We are here this morning because, in one way or another, we have said to Jesus, “I will follow you.” But the truth of the matter is that most of us don't want to follow Jesus because we want him to follow us. Hence, we are only partially faithful to him. But the Good News is that we are following him as best we can. We will leave this hour of Eucharistic worship and return to the world with all sorts of tough choices and difficult demands. Hence, we need to pray for strength, we need to ask for forgiveness when we fail, and we need to renew our determination to walk with Jesus by being loyal to our spouse and family, earning our living honestly, and living not only peacefully, but lovingly, with our neighbors.

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