

13th Sunday Year C

In our gospel reading this weekend Jesus and the apostles are walking along a road when they encounter several people. Among them are three individuals whom Jesus invites to follow Him. Our gospel passage this weekend, therefore, is about being called.

Let's put this gospel story into perspective: by the time this event happens Jesus has been going throughout the countryside for a couple of years. By now He has healed the sick, performed many miracles, even raised the dead back to life. His fame had spread all throughout the region. Those whom He encounters on the road today know who He is. They've heard about all of these things He has done. Jesus is now recognized as an influential religious figure. To receive such a personal invitation from Him would have been a significant thing.

How remarkable it is then that these individuals don't accept His invitation. And the gospel writer makes it a point to give us the reasons that they use not to follow Him. One is concerned about his wife and family, and wants to go tell them that he'll be gone for a while. Another wants to go and bury his father who has presumably just passed away. These are all very understandable reasons. We can hardly fault them for wanting to do these things before they go off with Jesus. I suspect, however, that this *is not* the real point of this gospel story. For nowhere in the gospels does Jesus discount the importance of family obligations. In fact, for an observant Jew, which Jesus was, there was hardly any more important an obligation than a child to a parent. Jesus oftentimes uses exaggeration to prove a point. I suspect that this is the case here.

Imagine if Jesus were to walk through the doors of this Church right now and ask us the very same thing as he does these three men in today's gospel. "*Come, follow me.*" I like to think that I would immediately drop everything and follow Him. But would I? Are you and I really willing to drop everything and follow? Are we really prepared to abandon our own desires and prerogatives: *right now, right here?* We all have ambitions and desires that lay outside the strict scope of who we are: as parents and children, a priest, or whatever. Am I willing to give up my personal interests and desires to follow Jesus more faithfully? Am I willing to turn over my golf clubs, the desire to be more recognized and acclaimed by my peers, my day off and leisure activities, if to do so would make me a better Christian? This is the "nitty-gritty" of today's gospel passage.

I can think back to my own time in my life when I was considering the priesthood. I entered seminary back in 1993. A 17 year old, with eight years of seminary before me. This was the invitation I heard: "come, follow me." I had a lot of concerns about what lay ahead of me those eight years: was I capable of doing the studying and the class work? Did I have the discipline to follow the rules? *This was a big one:* could I actually get up in front of people and talk? These are but a few of the dozens of questions I asked myself. At times during those eight years it would have been quite easy to use one of those excuses and quit... to walk away. Somehow, with the help of God I suppose, I didn't. Each day I woke up in seminary there was that same invitation: "*come, follow me.*" "*No matter what today might hold, no matter what challenge you might face, no matter how hard that next paper will be to write, or how difficult the next test will be to pass: Come, follow me!*"

After I was Ordained, and left the shelter of seminary, things didn't get any easier. Suddenly the questions were: *will you persevere? Will you put together a decent homily this weekend? Will you have something meaningful to say to the penitent in the confessional? Will you answer the ringing phone at 3 in the morning that calls you to the hospital? Will you persevere in your commitments to prayer, to obedience, to chastity?* One day, after three years at two parish assignments, the phone rang: "*will you go to Meade county and be pastor of two parishes?*" There, again, was that same voice: "*come, follow me!*"

Since answering yes to that invitation there have been some big challenges, both for us as a community, and myself personally. Personally, I have struggled with how to manage the increased demands on my time.

How do I balance the demands of administration with the need to be available pastorally? They don't exactly teach a course on the "ins-and-outs" of running two parishes in seminary. Figuring out who does what and when has been difficult. Learning names has never been a strong-suit for me, and after three years I'm finally starting to make progress in this. And I have never done so much driving in my life: in three years, I am about to pass the hundred thousand mile mark. We have faced challenges as a community as well: the challenge of clustering together with another parish, the change of Mass times, the loss of our school at St. John's. All of these have been painful. Honestly, I can tell you that the temptation to give up has been there at times. The grass is sometimes greener on the other side. But in the midst of it all that voice is still there: *"come, follow me!" "No matter what challenge you might face today, no matter how difficult the next test, or meeting, or task will be: come, follow me!"*

We all face challenges in this life. Many of you face the challenge of being a good parent and spouse. Balancing your obligations at work with your obligation to be there for your family. There is the challenge of being a good son or daughter to your own parents. I know, all too well, that it is a struggle to remain faithful to our own individual callings in this life. Each of us are called in a unique way to be faithful: you to your spouse, me to the promises I have made. Each of us are called to be people of faith and prayer. Each of us are called to follow the example of Christ. There will be times when that calling seems overwhelming to us. When the temptation will be there to give up. When the grass on the other side seems so much greener that we want to climb the fence. When your spouse becomes old and frail, and you find yourself holding their hand in a hospital room somewhere; when a son or daughter gets into trouble with alcohol or drugs; when your marriage struggles or fails; when you lose your job; when a friend dies.

"Come, follow me!" "No matter what challenge you might face today, no matter how difficult the next test, or meeting, or task will be: come, follow me!"