

13th Sunday (A)

2nd July 2023

'Faith & family ties'

2K4: Elisha & Shunemite woman

Ps 88:

Rom 6: *Death has no power over Him any more*

Mt 10:37–42: *Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me ...*

For a second Sunday in a row we have Gospel teaching from Jesus that undoubtedly brings us up short. Last week we had the words, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; fear Him, rather, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.* This week, again, we have striking, direct words from the mouth of Christ: *Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me ... Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me.* When we hear words like that from the Son of God — seemingly harsh words — how do we respond? Do we sweep them under the carpet; try to pretend we didn't hear them; try to argue that Jesus didn't quite mean that ... Or do we take the words to heart and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts with God's true meaning?

I'm sure that Jesus did in fact mean just what he said: that for the Christian the priority is always our relationship with God in Christ ... and our priority of love

for the Lord has to be maintained even if members of our very family do not support us in our faith, and may sometimes in fact make life very hard for us. I'm sure that almost everyone here has some story to tell of that sort, some part of the family who does not embrace the faith to the extent that you do. Maybe even a parent, or a sibling — perhaps they didn't convert when you did; or perhaps they have fallen away whilst you held firm. It is a fact of life, but often a very painful one. To see members of your family, or even close friends, unable or unwilling to come to complete life in Christ can be the cause of much sadness. But Jesus urges us to faithfulness: encourages us to welcome Him with open heart and ready will, eager to do whatever He has in store for us, even if some suffering and sorrow.

Of course, we do not hope for families unhappily split by faith. What we hope and pray and work for is family life which is complete and unified in faith, wherein married parents and joyfully received children are united in putting into practice every day their love and worship of

God in Jesus Christ, and in service of neighbour. This is the Christian ideal, and we never let go of it. It is the example we are all called to set, even though we have to live in the rather messier circumstances of the day-to-day.

Sometimes I meet someone who married outside the faith, and instead of holding firm to their faith, they chose to let the other's lack of faith, and lack of love for God, gradually drag them away from their Mass-going and prayers, to the point where they have completely abandoned the Lord. This is intensely sad, and the very opposite of the Jesus's message. The Gospel urges us instead *to hold firm* to Christ. If non-believers, or the lapsed, do not see our faith in action, then what hope have they got? But if we hold firm, if we maintain our devotion to Jesus in the Mass, and in our prayers — and couple it always with patience and a sense of trust in God's ways — then who knows what can happen? The best that can happen is a gradual conversion of others: they see the joy and peace and central truth of life that faith in Jesus brings, and can be brought to faith. How happy that is!! — that

our faith has allowed God to work in the heart of another. Maybe that won't be the case, but it will certainly *never* be the case if we don't keep faith with the Lord. The Lord calls us to stay on the road with Him, faithfully, lifelong: *Anyone who does not take his Cross and follow in My footsteps is not worthy of Me!*

These remain challenging words, don't they? And there's no getting away from the *challenge* that Our Lord brings. *Challenge* coupled with *compassion* is always the way of Jesus, and we have to live and work within that constructive tension, knowing that the Lord both blesses and forgives, sets us on our feet again if we fall, and urges us on. Maybe indeed we have family situations of sadness, or of abandonment of Jesus, or of unwillingness to consider the faith at all. We need both to commit these to Christ in prayer, without fail; and to offer the best-possible practical witness and example of a Christian life. This will include being clear about the reasons for our believing — the absolute truth that life finds its meaning (and that our *personal* life has found *its* own meaning) in the Gospel of

Jesus. We cannot convince if we are only seen as sheep following the crowd, or keeping what seems just an outdated tradition. No, we need to assure those who may dismiss, belittle, or sideline our faith, that in our keeping to the Christian way we are adhering to the one *we know truly* to be our personal Saviour; we are lovingly and freely choosing this path because to follow in His footsteps, despite any Cross He may bid us to carry, is the only sure path to life. We have His holy word for it.

I know it may sometimes seem like a tautology: in the *Act of Faith* we say, “My God, I believe in You and in all Your Church teaches, because You have said it and Your word is true.” But this is the truth of it, that we believe because it is self-consistent, it has credibility, it holds together. We cannot prove it from ‘first principles,’ exactly, because God and only God is the first principle of all being, and we are beings He has willed into existence. But we can show its consistency with our own spiritual nature, and the ordered rationality of the cosmos. And above, the consistency that it creates within our own lives,

the personal spiritual experience of Jesus loving our hearts and through the Church guiding our feet into the way of peace.

So, let’s always allow Our Blessed Lord to walk close with us and assure us that we are on the right path. Especially if we feel alone, or separated from others in our adherence to Jesus’s way, let’s ask Him for his reassuring presence, a word of peace and an inner tranquillity. The pilgrim Church of 2000yrs of saints — and the rest of us! — never ceases to follow in Jesus’s way, and it always will. There will ever be that degree of tension and sadness that all do not (yet) know that “God wills all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” But within that tension, Our Lord works His will, He keeps us firm in faith, He humbles us and makes us docile to His Spirit, and gives us that grace to choose to follow Him, come what may.

May the heart of Jesus, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time, Amen.