

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

Have you ever had to purchase a one-way ticket? Unless it's a one-way ticket home, there's always something a little bit risky associated with it: How long will this journey last? What will I encounter along the way? What am I getting myself into?

To set out on a journey with only one-way ticket requires a willingness to allow the future to unfold without a predetermined plan; it requires the ticket holder to let go of control over his/her ultimate destiny and remain open to whatever may lie ahead.

Discipleship demands a similar sense of abandon because those who set out to follow wherever God leads must surrender themselves to a lifelong journey over which they are no longer calling the shots.

Both today's gospel as well as the first reading make use of the motif of setting out on a journey: Jesus resolutely sets his face toward Jerusalem—a one-way trip to the cross and, through the cross, to resurrected life. Elisha accepts the invitation to leave his former life behind and follow Elijah on the journey as prophet of the Most High.

The gospel provides other examples where the call of discipleship does not get so clear a response, or is compromised by other factors.

The disciples, for example, are still caught up in what being close to Jesus can do for them. They are still tending to think in terms of power and might, and expect that God will feel the same way about being rejected by the Samaritans as they do.

They are like those among us who are quick to get offended for some slight against God—failing to take off one's hat in church for example, for not genuflecting before entering the pew.

Their righteous indignation really has no place with Jesus. His solution: "Let's move on to another village."

And then there's the man who is all caught up in the "romanticism" of being a disciple. He can't imagine that there would be anything that would keep him from following Jesus.

This is one of the things we see a lot of in forming new recruits to the Franciscans. Francis is such a romantic figure, and that's part of his attraction. Still, to live within a community of disciples as the friars try to be means taking seriously the nuts and bolts of friary living. That's where the rubber hits the road.

Jesus is telling us that every disciple has to deal with that. We have to be realistic as to what the demands of discipleship are so that we are prepared to respond to them.

A third encounter has Jesus calling and the person would like to respond—after he gets done with everything else. Who thinks that that will ever happen? It's easy to put off the call until a more convenient time, but what that really does is to put it off for good.

To be a disciple means to make room, in the here and now, for what God is calling us to. That's difficult, to be sure, but it is an

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affirmative response rather than one that only fakes saying “yes.”

The final would-be disciple is interested in following Jesus so long as his family is okay with it. If they are not, he will spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder.

The kingdom of God is about steadfastly moving into a future that people must desire more than anything else. Seeking permission avoids the question of personal decision.

But that’s the only thing that really will get the job done. Jesus went to the cross in response to God’s call to proclaim the good news whether people wanted to hear it or not.

In our lives, too, there has to be a part of us that is so personally committed to following the Lord, that we don’t even think of looking around to see what the other people think.

Today’s gospel is quite the challenge. Lucky for us, we don’t have to respond alone or rely only on our own devices.

God calls, but he also walks with us on the journey, strengthening us with the Eucharist and enlivening us with his Holy Spirit.

We take heart in that and simply try to keep moving forward on the path that leads to life.