



***Thirteenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005***

***2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16 Romans 6:3-4, 8-11 Matthew 10: 37-42***

From verse 26 of this tenth chapter of Matthew we have a collection of sayings after the style of Proverbs. A collection of sayings only loosely connected to one another. Most of these sayings were part of the general collection familiar to the early Christian communities. Matthew probably made his selection to fit his general mission thrust and because he saw a connection between them and his local situation.

If this is so then we can presume that family divisions were already occurring in Matthew's community. This is not surprising when similar problems exist in any family where children decide to follow a different path from the traditional family one.

The challenge around worthiness has been taken too literally over the years. The Essenes required their members to make a radical break with family. Many religious Orders also made separation from family a matter of Rule. Sometimes we have to make choices around family that are very difficult, for example when members are involved in addictive behaviour but our Christian teaching tells us that our way to God lies through the ordinary relationships that are part of every human story, in fact today, we would have serious doubts about any group that demanded an adherent cut themselves off from family ties.

To be a disciple involves pain. This is not a good in itself but a consequence of trying to be faithful in difficult situations and in the face of discouragement. Matthew's saying about the cross is given an almost poetic rendering in Paul's reflection on the paschal mystery in our lives.

Paul encourages us in our labours by reminding us of the enormous gift of God's grace which covers us like a mantle. Even our sins are a source of opportunity for grace. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. It raised us to a new life. Our symbolic death and resurrection has freed us from the mesh of sin. Our sins, setbacks, temporary lapses have no power over us. We have difficulty remembering this at times of darkness. As Christians we have been encouraged by the countless men and women and also children who have lived life in the light of this faith in a God who is true to his Word.

The passage from second Kings is a wonderful story. It is told in verses 8-37. Our reading has been truncated but it is necessary to read the whole story to get the beauty of the narrative and to see the connection with the Gospel. It touches on two points. The first is that those who receive the agent of God are offering hospitality to God. The second is that it is a death and resurrection story.

Elisha, the disciple of Elijah, formed a relationship with a family who not only welcomed him on his travels but also created a little personal retreat for the man of God. As a thank you for such generosity, in the name of God Elisha announced that she would bear a son. When the boy reached the age of being able to accompany his father to work he took sick and died. This is the greatest challenge to the faith of parents. The mother set out on an arduous journey to visit the prophet. She asked for her son's life. In a gesture reminiscent of Mary in the garden she clung to Elisha vowing not to let go until her son was restored to her. Elisha responded and the son who was dead was restored to life.

Not only do we have a story of great faith but we have echoes of two other mothers, the widow of Naim and Mary of Nazareth and the sisters of Lazarus. There is also an echo of the return of the wandering son in the father's words to the brother, "Rejoice you brother who was dead has come back to life again."

All telling of scripture draws threads that bring other stories and each biblical narrative contributes to the up-building of our own faith in our destiny.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.