

13th Sunday in OT Cycle A, July 2, 2017

We are all familiar with that old saying: “Water is thicker than blood.” Did I get that right?

We may think it is the other way around; but I am referring of course to the implications of our Baptism – something very much on the mind of St. Paul in today’s second reading.

In a similar way, the Gospel may puzzle us with Jesus asserting: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me or whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Wow. What is this all about?

St Paul was writing to people who had chosen to be baptized; and he asks them, why they did it. Although most of us were carried unwittingly to the font, the question still holds for us.

What difference does Baptism make in our lives?

Is there any real life changing commitment involved when we walk through those doors week after week and bless ourselves with holy water, a reminder of our Baptism?

For a change we might imagine St. Paul as a charismatic, passionate preacher asking with great drama:

“Are you unaware, that we, who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death?”

Are you unaware?

Are you paying attention?

Have you thought seriously about this?”

The message is clear: Our baptism does matter. It changes us. It calls us to re-think our value system, to review what truly counts, to recommit ourselves to what really matters in this life.

Today's Gospel re-enforces that message. It comes from what is called Matthew's "Missionary Discourse." Like last week's passages it contains instructions from Jesus to those who are going out to preach in his name.

Jesus warns his followers that the kind of commitment required of them, can easily lead to divisions that reach even into one's family.

Suffering is also part of the life of an apostle. Discipleship is not easy or comfortable.

At the close of this discourse on being a missionary, we hear a message that is similar to our first reading from the Book of Kings, that those who care for a messenger of the gospel will be rewarded.

Whoever offers a cup of water for the sake of the Lord Jesus is serving Jesus himself.

Hospitality is an important virtue.

This kind woman from Shunem, who rearranges her home so Elisha could stay there every time he passed through her village, did not ask any favors from the Lord or from the prophet. She simply was doing a good deed for a good man.

Ultimately as my grandmother used to tell me – I am not sure I believed her – virtue is its own reward - as we express our love and generosity to others, not wanting or expecting anything in return.

Hospitality means acknowledging the presence of God in others and serving them, especially the least among us.

We become fully alive as Christians through the generous giving of ourselves.

Our gospel and our First reading also suggest that we can give of ourselves in many different ways.

Not all of us go into foreign missions, or serve the gospel in heroic ways, or stand up here and preach mediocre homilies, yet we can all be part of the “support staff” for those who preach the good news.

This is a good time to re-evaluate the importance of the small things that we do out of faith. St Therese of Lisieux said that not all of us are called to do great things, but that all of us are capable of doing small things with great love.

How can you serve and support this faith community of St Mary?

Faye Williams tells me we are in need of Lectors and Alter Servers, and even more there is a need for ushers, who also serve as greeters. It is so important that when folks walk up those daunting steps out there and encounter those heavy imposing doors, that there is a person with a smile, and a welcome, a sincere showing of hospitality, waiting for them.

Let me mention as well the new St Vincent DePaul Conference that has been formed here at St Mary – named for St Teresa of Calcutta. That conference has as its goal - personal one on one outreach to those who are in need right here in this community. Please consider joining us.

Finally a reminder that Tuesday we celebrate Independence Day, a festival of flag-waving and fireworks, through which we declare our pride in the nation that provides us so many liberties.

We who “belong” as U.S. citizens are deeply grateful that we do.

We know that many around the world would be just as eager to belong to this story because of all the freedoms and opportunities it provides.

How our nation grows that “belonging” - sensibly, safely, and justly, remains a problem to be solved and worth pondering on this 4th of July.

In terms of the just treatment of immigrants, the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to the obligations that more prosperous nations have, to the extent they are able, to welcome the *foreigner* in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.

Living the new life in Christ that comes from our baptism should cause us to look at the world with new eyes.

We do not see strangers but brothers and sisters in Christ.

We seek out opportunities to offer welcome, to lend a helping hand, and to extend loving concern.

Water is thicker than blood.