

## Set your face towards full freedom

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle C – 30 June 2019

Readings: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21; Gal 5:1,13-18; Lk 9:51-62

*“For freedom Christ has set us free”* (Gal 5:1)

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. Live is always in movement; it is a never-ending process. God has envisaged a beautiful ‘dream’ for each of us, whether one labels it as a ‘call’ or ‘vocation’ or ‘mission’. In responding to this call or mission, one could either be progressing or regressing or digressing—depending on the options one makes and the efforts one takes to fulfill that God-given mission. In the first and third readings we see beautiful instances how different people either respond, or do not respond, to the call. The first reading describes the call of Elisha to be a prophet. He is called to be the successor of Elijah, one of the greatest of the non-writing prophets, who achieved so much and suffered immensely to preserve the genuine faith of Israel’s northern kingdom. Elisha is a farmer who “was ploughing ... with twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him.” By throwing his mantle over Elisha, Elijah symbolically does two things: first, because the mantle represents the personality and rights of its’ owner (see Ruth 3:9), its casting over Elisha means that Elisha now belongs to Elijah. Secondly, because the hair-shirt mantle was part of the official dress of the prophets (see 2 Kings 1:8; Zech 13:4), to cast it over another meant a formal investing with the authority that comes from being initiated in the membership of prophets. Elisha is generous in responding. He slaughters his oxen, and uses the wooden yoke to cook what might be called a ‘non-veg farewell feast’! Isn’t this a good example of what we call ‘burning one’s boats’ or, quite literally, ‘burning one’s plough’ in order to march ahead towards what one sees as of utmost importance?
2. In the gospel reading, we see Jesus fulfilling his *Abba*-given mission to proceed towards Jerusalem in order to undergo his passion and death. The opening sentence in the passage is significant: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus *‘set his face’* to go to Jerusalem.” The line indicates that we are moving into the second phase of Jesus’ life and the second half of Luke’s gospel. The important phrase is *‘set his face’*—showing that Jesus has a clear purpose in his moves, which are well thought about and unchangeable. There’s no looking back for Jesus, who proceeds to Jerusalem where his life’s mission is to be fulfilled in suffering and death, and, ultimately, resurrection. His Father’s will is of utmost importance for him.

*A minor detour ....* On the road to Jerusalem, when people do not receive Jesus in a Samaritan village, James and John, the ‘sons of thunder’ ask, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?” This is an option of violence, which the zealots would like to adopt against the Romans. Jesus resists the temptation, rebukes them, and carries on. He retains his focus on his goal and will not have any distractions—much less, options of violence—to deter him.

3. After this, there are three persons who desire to follow Jesus. The first one courageously says to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” He has a lot of enthusiasm but seems

unaware of the ground realities. To Jesus' invitation for discipleship, the second person makes a seemingly valid request: "Let me go and bury my father first." Obviously, the man's father wasn't dead at that time, but he wanted to follow Jesus only after all his familial obligations were fulfilled. To bury one's father was not only a 'valid excuse', so to say, but it was also a sacred duty in the Jewish tradition. Likewise, the third person is willing to follow Jesus after bidding farewell to his family members. This, too, seems to be a 'good deed' to be done. But Jesus wants him, and all the others who are called, to follow him immediately, here-and-now. Moreover, he gives them one more illustration of faithful following, namely, that of a ploughman and his task of ploughing. For this tiresome task to be successful, the plowman cannot be looking back to see how well he has been ploughing, but must concentrate on the path ahead or else his work will be in vain.

### **Linking the Second Reading to the Overriding Theme:**

To be obedient to God and to follow God's will is to be truly, interiorly free. This might sound ironical—but, one's freedom does not come from doing what one 'wants' or 'likes' or 'enjoys' but from listening to the voice of conscience and doing what God wants one to do. Hence, in the second reading Paul says, "For freedom, Christ has set us free." Paul warns against self-indulgence and preaches the gospel of love. Freedom, for Paul, comes from "being guided by the Spirit." Am I truly free? Am I guided by the Spirit?

### **Two Current Concerns:**

*The Consumerist Concern:* "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die!" is the guiding-principle of many people, today. Many people deny the need for any 'permanent values' or 'final goal'. They "gratify the desires of the flesh and do not walk by the Spirit," as Paul would put it. Can we see beyond temporary satisfaction to gain something 'eternal'?

*The Attachment Concern:* Like the three would-be disciples in the gospel passage, we seek to follow Jesus—but with conditions: 'ifs' and 'buts'. The chains that bind us are our own attachments to property and persons, our own fears and failures, our drugs and desires. It is only when we break these 'yokes' or chains that we become truly free. Jesus' always 'set his face' Godward. Why don't we 'set our face' on Him, and Him alone?

**Pope Francis to Youth** in '*Christus vivit*' (n.122): "Dear young people, you are priceless! You are not up for sale! Please, do not let yourselves be bought. Do not let yourselves be seduced. Do not let yourselves be enslaved by forms of ideological colonization that put ideas in your heads, with the result that you end up becoming slaves, addicts, failures in life. You are priceless! You must repeat this always: 'I am not up for sale; I do not have a price. *I am free!*' Fall in love with this freedom, which is what Jesus offers."

### **In Lighter Vein:**

An absentminded professor was late for his class. He jumped into a taxi and shouted, "Hurry! Drive fast!" As the cab sped along, he realized that he hadn't told the driver where to go. So, he asked, "Do you know where I'm going?" "No, sir," said the cabbie, "but I'm driving as fast as I can!" Alas, too many of us are speeding down roads, directionless. In our busy, noisy world, Jesus shows us the goal towards which we must *set our face* and travel, along with Him, to true freedom!

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