

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

THEME: "WHOEVER RECEIVES YOU RECEIVES ME"

The common message of today's readings is the work God gives us to do as the followers of Jesus: to love God and our brothers and sisters through hospitality, generosity, commitment, and charity. The readings also remind us of the sacrifice demanded of Jesus' disciples and the suffering they will endure for their Faith when they bear witness to him.

In our first reading, we see, the welcome given to the prophet Elijah by an elderly, childless woman and her husband who lived in Shunem. The woman recognized the holiness of Elisha. She showed him reverence and hospitality by inviting him to dine with her and her husband and by arranging an upper room of their house so that Elisha might stay with them when he visited the area. In response, Elisha promised her, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son." The promise was fulfilled by God.

The second reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, explains why those who care for the followers of Jesus are caring for Jesus himself, and those who show hospitality to any one of them are eligible for a reward. By our Baptism, we have been baptized into Jesus' death and buried with him, and we look forward to our resurrection with him (Rom 6:5). Since Baptism marks our entrance into this new life, it makes us part of the Body of Christ, and Christ is truly present in us. That is why the one who welcomes us welcomes Christ and becomes eligible for a reward.

Jesus in today's Gospel reading tells the twelve apostles about the cost and the reward of the commitment required for being his disciples. In the first part Jesus details the behavior expected of his disciples, and in the second part he speaks of the behavior expected of others towards the disciples. Jesus assures his disciples that whoever shows them hospitality will be rewarded. Those who receive Jesus receive the One who sent him. Also, those who help his disciples will be amply rewarded.

My dear friends in Christ, we need to be hospitable and generous: Hospitality means acknowledging the presence of God in others and serving him in them, especially those in whom we least expect to find him. We, as individuals and as a community, are to look for opportunities to be hospitable--and, of course, there are plenty of ways of offering hospitality.

Hospitality can be offered through a kind word to a stranger - or even a smile. A kind smile or a "hello" to someone waiting with us in a grocery line may be the only kindness that person encounters for that day. We become fully alive as Christians through the generous giving of ourselves. What is more important than sending checks for charitable causes is giving of ourselves to people, first, in the way we think about them, for from that spring will flow the ways we speak to them and about them, forgive their failings, encourage them, show them respect, console them, and offer them help. Such kindness reflects warmth glowing from the very love of God.