

## 13th Sunday of the Year, Year C

Today's Responsorial Psalm is a lyrical expression of an intense religious experience and a declaration of exclusive loyalty to God. The psalmist finds his joy in the Lord, not in what the Lord has given him or done for him: 'You are my God. You are my inheritance. You are my prize'. He is never alone, because he keeps his eyes fixed on the Lord, and he is confident that God will reveal to him the path of life and will give him fullness of joy in his presence.

It is for this communion with God that we are made and it is the object of our deepest longing. There are times when we forget this and we seek desperately for love without realising that true love can be found only from within a relationship of communion with God. But our restless heart is never satisfied, and, whether we realise it or not, it keeps hungering for the peace and communion of which the psalm speaks.

In the second reading Paul speaks of our freedom. There are limits to the freedom we experience, but no one can take it from us completely. No matter what our situation we can always take a step of love, a small step towards truth. We can always respond to grace by saying Yes to the call of Jesus to follow him.

Today's Gospel presents three lessons that must be learned if we are going to be companions of Jesus. The first is that we have to be ready for surprises, and we have to let go security that locks us out of life. The life God offers is a life of love. To remain open to love is to remain open to the action of God's Holy Spirit. The inspiration of God and his call can come from any direction and can take us anywhere. Like Jesus we must be ready to find our rest wherever God takes us. As Paul reminds us: 'If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence'.

The second man wants to go home and complete his duties as a son on the farm, and come back to Jesus only after his father dies. In other words he wants to do God's will but only in the left over moments, only after all the business and family affairs have been looked after and completed. This is not the way we acted when we were courting. It is not the way we react when our heart has been won. We must give the affairs of the heart priority. This is true in regard to our wife or husband and our family and friends. It is absolutely true of our relationship with God. We must give it first place in our hearts, and we will do so if we truly come to see, like the Psalmist that God has the first place in our heart: 'You must love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength'.

The third man also wants to fit in other things first and then respond to the call of God's love. It doesn't work like that.

Paul alerts us to what can happen when we are out of touch with God. Jesus calls us to love one another as he loves us. But in fact we can find ourselves 'snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces'. 'You had better watch' warns Paul, 'or you will destroy the whole community'.

With all the pressures that are upon us, all the hurts and disappointments, how can we learn to love the way Jesus loved? The answer takes us back to the psalm. We need to believe in the amazing love that God has for us, and we need to nourish this faith in prayer.

Jesus said that he was not alone and that he always did what pleased his Father (John 8:29). He experienced fullness of life and he wanted those he called to experience it as well (John 10:10). It is in communion with Jesus that we come to experience his joy and the fullness of life to which we are called.

Our character emerges through the choices that we make about our heart's desire for love. So we need to develop the habit of prayer. For this we need to create spaces of silence in our lives to give our souls permission not to have to speak, but to breathe and to listen and to respond to the love of the Holy Spirit, which God is wanting to pour into our hearts. I am not speaking of artificial space which acts like an anaesthetic, dulling our hearts to the realities of our life, but a space that allows us to stop being caught up in past hurts or fears of the future or dragged about by our own or other people's expectations. A space that allows us to truly enter the present moment, with its real pain and its real joys, its real darkness and its real light, and there to let ourselves be loved by God and respond in love.

The most important fact about the present moment - and after all the present moment is the only reality we actually have - is that God is creating me out of love and creating me for love. God is actually loving me now in the most wise and delicate way. It may not feel like it, but it is true, even, and in a way especially, when we are experiencing suffering. For that can cast us more thoroughly into God's care, and God always hears the cries of the distressed.

Many people find it helpful to discover a mantra that comes from their soul - a short phrase that floats on the breath and expressed a present longing, or recalls a special moment of grace. We can learn to repeat such a phrase at regular intervals, till it becomes part of our breathing and so keeps us constantly linked to God, stretching out to him and yielding to his presence.

All of us need to put aside some quality time just to open the petals of our soul for the sun to warm and nourish them. Just make an act of faith in God's presence and God's love and consecrate the few moments to God, asking God to love you. Such moments are precious. Surely every one of us can find or make time each day when we are less likely to be distracted from this. Those who need us will soon learn that we are better able to love them if we have this time to ourselves, and they will learn to respect our need to be alone. This is probably the most important lesson we can give a spouse or our children, for they will surely sense the presence of God in our lives and the love that radiates out from prayer.

If you are not in the habit of making constant aspirations to God or of putting aside moments each day to allow God to love you, a good start would be to read again the psalm of today's Mass (Psalm 16 in the Bible) and make it your own!