

### **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

How do you get on when you trying to choose a birthday gift for someone close to you? It can be very difficult to find the gift that says what you want to say to them. It can be hard to choose a gift that you think they would need or appreciate.

The Prophet Elisha was trying to find something he could give to the Shunamite woman who had offered him such generous hospitality each time he travelled through her town. As we read today, this woman even built a small room on the roof of her house and furnished it with a bed, table, chair and lamp so that the prophet could rest there on his travels. She did this because she recognised that Elisha was a holy man of God. When this woman was asked what she would like to reward her for her hospitality, she replied “I live with my own people about me.” It was as if she was saying that she needed nothing. But Elisha’s servant found out more about her and told the prophet that she had no son and her husband was old. Elisha was then able to offer her new life. “This time next year you will hold a son in your arms.”

We read this story today to reinforce what we hear Jesus speak about in our gospel. Our passage begins by describing some of the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus. If we are forced to make a choice between doing

what our family asks of us and what Jesus asks of us, we must choose what Jesus asks of us. Following Jesus calls us to carry our crosses and following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is only by being ready to lose our life in love for others that we will find our life. Many of you know what that means better than I do. When we look back on our lives we might well remember that the times when we were most alive were the times when we forgot about ourselves and freely gave ourselves to another person in our love and our care for them.

Jesus then speaks about the mystery and the rewards of hospitality. Hospitality allows us to experience something unseen. “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me.” Those who were open to the word that Jesus spoke opened themselves up to the God for whom He spoke. In welcoming Jesus and his message, they were welcoming the God who had sent him into the world. The same would be true for those who welcomed the disciples of Jesus. The hidden Jesus that the disciples carried to them would be made known to them.

I heard a delightful story during the week of a newly married woman going to a country town with her husband. She was a well educated but shy young woman who didn’t easily enter into conversation with the locals. They thought of her as a bit of a snob. But things

changed when she took the time to speak to a man, she later discovered to have the reputation as the town drunk. When others saw that she had time for someone that most of them tried to avoid, they started to talk to her. Hospitality in whatever way we offer it always has its rewards. We are made richer by the stories that we hear and by the friendships that may come by our listening to others.

I suppose this is even more true if we offer hospitality to a prophet, as the Shunamite woman did in our first reading. Jesus goes on to say, “Anyone who welcomes a prophet will have a prophet’s reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man will have a holy man’s reward.” But we do not know who the prophets are in our world until we stop to listen to them. We do not know who the holy men or women are around us until we get to know them and hear their stories. And that often begins to happen when we offer them a cup of tea or coffee. “If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you most solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.”

Paul’s letter to the Romans today tells us how we become disciples of the Lord. He talks about our union with Jesus being celebrated by our Baptism. We are plunged into Christ’s death, so that our life is now

Christ’s life. Scripture scholars tell us that Paul invented some Greek words to describe how close our union with Jesus is. One of those words “Synphotoi, is now used in medical terminology to express how two parts of a broken bone grow together again and merge into a bond stronger than the original. It is rather humbling to think that through our baptism Christ’s story becomes my story. Christ’s strength becomes my strength. Christ’s body becomes my body. Christ’s risen life becomes my risen life.

I am still trying to work out what all that means. But perhaps today it is enough to hold onto to the truth that Christ makes himself known to us through others and we make Christ known to others by the way that we relate to them. Offering and receiving hospitality is a great way for that to begin to happen.