

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 26 June 2022

Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:19-21; Galatians 5:1,13-18; Luke 9:51-62

Homily: Fr. Ken

In today's Gospel, when Jesus says "follow me", the response he is looking for is an immediate one. Jesus' message is quite clear. He tells his followers that their mission is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God.

To those who simply ask if they can pop home and say goodbye to their families, which request we certainly might consider to be a perfectly reasonable request, Jesus again is startlingly clear: "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God". There is a popular hymn that uses words from this Gospel: "The foxes have their holes and the swallows have their nests, but the Son of man has no place to lay down". The message, if we think about it, is an alarming one. Jesus has nowhere to call home.

So when we read the Gospel today, what do we think? Are we disturbed by Jesus' seeming impatience? Do his demands seem too much? How are we to respond to our Lord? Do the consequences of responding to his call to follow him seem a bit scary?

If we understand Jesus correctly, there is no reason for us to fear. Jesus is telling his disciples that their mission is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. If it is their mission, that means it is ours as well, here and now. People can often forget that we are together as brothers and sisters. People can sometimes think that they are not the worthy ones and a holier and more qualified person will come along. Jesus is telling us very

clearly today that the proclamation of the kingdom of God is the mission of all of us.

I have been a member of St. Rita parish for 18 years, this month of June. And I have seen firsthand the generosity and concern that our parishioners have expressed following the call of Jesus.

There are so, so many examples. Our current drought and fire season reminds me that it was just three years ago that our parishioners responded spontaneously to our sisters and brothers in the wildfire-destroyed town of Paradise, by generously contributing \$23,000 to aid impacted families. No other parish in Marin did anything near that.

And, of course, we have a very engaged St. Vincent de Paul Society who aid with food and rent and other assistance to help as many local needy families as possible. And, following the direction of Pope Francis, we hope to soon be going solar.

Some of our parishioners who have been fortunate to serve on a Guatemala Mission delegation have seen up close the success of our Guatemala Mission Project. It may be new to others of you. In the tiny town of El Sitio, up in the highlands, thanks to the generosity of our parishioners, we have built a grammar school, a high school, a Church, a multi-purpose building, as well as providing college scholarships for needy students. We also have regularly provided children's chewable vitamins and a wide variety of school supplies. Nearby in the adjacent town of Patzun, we built and support a carpenter school. In the lakeside large city of Santiago Atitlan, with its original church built in 1547, we have built classrooms, provided school supplies including computers. And joining with other organizations we built a new hospital to replace the one destroyed by an enormous mud slide from Hurricane Stan in 2005. Since the hospital opened in 2010, they have served tens of thousands of patients, especially now during COVID-19.

There is also the challenge for the Church's future. In Guatemala it is not a problem. Catholic schools are expanding and students are very active in the Church. Families, including all the children, attend Mass every weekend.

It is obviously not quite the same here. In Marin County, for example, on any given weekend, the per cent of the population attending religious services in a church or synagogue is only 4%.

In the U.S. Catholic Church nationwide there now exists a very real challenge for the future. Today, 50% of all Catholics thirty years old and younger have already left the Church. Half of all kids that were baptized and confirmed in the last 30 years are now ex-Catholics or completely unaffiliated. And, one out of six millennials in the U.S. is now a "former Catholic".

Moreover, for every one person joining our Church in the U.S. today, seven are leaving, and most are leaving at younger ages, primarily before the age of twenty-three.

At our Catholic schools in Guatemala, in El Sitio, and in Santiago Atitlan, we visited the students in every classroom. And we talked with them, especially the older students.

And to our expectation, when we asked each of them the classic question, "What do you want to do when you grow up?", every student without hesitation had an immediate response: I want to become a doctor, a nurse, an architect, an engineer, an agriculturalist, a teacher, an economist, an attorney, an environmentalist, and so on.

Their responses were the strongest endorsement of our mission in following Jesus—namely, the most important gift we have given those young students is the gift of hope.

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