**13th Sunday in Ordinary Time :  June 28, 2020**
St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

Reflection on the Scriptures     *2 Kings 4:8-16*     *Romans 6:3-11*     *Matthew 10:37-42*

God rewards those who are faithful and loyal. Nothing good happens to those who are disloyal or unfaithful. Those are the lessons taught by today's readings.

Faithfulness and loyalty are great virtues, but they are not the greatest of the virtues.  Perhaps they have been overemphasized.

In today's first reading from Second Kings, about the prophet Elisha, an unnamed woman of influence is kind to Elisha. The woman recognizes that Elisha is a man of God. She invites him to dinner once and then gives him a standing invitation to dine with her whenever he is in town. She provides him with a room reserved for him in her home. He is free to use it any time. Elisha learns that her greatest wish is to give birth to a son. God grants Elisha's request that she be given a son.

The second part of today's Gospel makes the same point. God will reward those who are loyal. In fact one verse, Mathew 10:41, seems to refer to the Elisha story in the first reading.

The first part of today's Gospel and the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans contain a riddle: "When is life not life and death not death?"  Mathew reports that Jesus said: "Whoever finds his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."  Paul told the Romans: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

The first two verses of today's Gospel are a metaphor. Jesus is asking us to be totally loyal to him. If a follower puts anyone or anything ahead of Jesus, that follower is unworthy of Jesus. The third verse is different: find your life and you will lose it. Lose your life through Jesus and you will find it. Jesus was saying: don't

be afraid to be martyred. If you are martyred you'll have eternal life. If you save yourself by denying Jesus, you will lose eternal life. Be strong. Be loyal. Your reward will be great.

Paul tells us that we died with Christ in baptism. Our sinful body has died. We are promised eternal life. Only we must not allow our mortal body to drag us back into sin. The end of chapter six of Romans (which is not part of today's gospel), is "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. "

These readings are typical of many in the Bible. Loyalty is rewarded. Faithfulness is rewarded. There is perhaps no more common theme in the Bible.

To my mind, loyalty and faithfulness are virtues, but they are not the most important.  Loyalty and faithfulness to the exclusion of other virtues is a real problem. We have seen this when police officers stand silent as their colleagues commit crimes. We have seen this when bishops cover up the actions of immoral priests. We have seen this when elected officials stand silent as powerful leaders abuse their offices.

To be sure, loyalty and faithfulness to God does not bring problems similar to loyalty and faithfulness between individuals.

I can't help but wish, however, that ethical behavior and following an informed conscience were virtues viewed as more important than the virtues of loyalty and faithfulness. Perhaps the readings chosen for the Roman Missal could place more emphasis on love, ethical behavior, compassion and following one's conscience and less emphasis on loyalty and faithfulness.

*Jim Casey*