

Homily for XIII (13) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C 26-06-2022 by Fr. Lubem Waya, osj

First Reading: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21

Psalm: Psalm 16

Second Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13-18

Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

WHY DO YOU LOOK BACK?

Today we come upon the curious story of Israel's greatest prophet, Elijah, whom God directs to go on a journey to find and anoint Elisha as his successor. Indeed, no leader is successful except he or she plans for continuity, a key part of which involves preparing a worthy successor for their office. Can you say you are such a leader? Elijah is certainly one because he did not hesitate to prepare Elisha whom God had chosen. Elisha is a wealthy plowman with twelve oxen ploughing his field. This wealth places him in a great dilemma when Elijah meets him. Should he gaze ahead and leave all the wealth and his family behind to follow Elijah and become God's prophet, or should he look back to his wealth with guaranteed financial security for himself and his family and reject the offer to be God's prophet? If he accepts, he must take leave of his family and the wealth so that God would become his priority and can have a space in His life to dwell. To overcome this, he slaughtered the oxen and burnt the tackle, thereby signifying the sacrifice of his own livelihood and family in order to be dedicated to God. Like him, we can only overcome temptations when we are ready to sacrifice that which is the object of our temptation. He did this without counting the cost because counting our costs makes us begin to look back with regrets for the things we have left behind, remembering only our sacrifices without recognizing the enormous gains that have grown out of them. That is why Christ says today, that, no one who puts his hand on the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom. Such a person keeps dwelling in the past, is distracted, and cannot forge ahead in life. What about you? Are you still looking back? You may never get to the banquet God has prepared for you. You must leave what is behind and look up to what lies ahead in order to keep moving on in the journey of life. This is the same reason Christ rebukes James and John in the gospel reading today.

As the good leader that He is, Christ did not only choose the apostles to succeed Him, but He also remained concerned about how they will succeed. So, He kept forming and directing them towards the goal. Himself doing this first of all by never losing focus of His goal even as His time drew near. Today He embarks on His great journey to Jerusalem to embrace His fate. There He would be betrayed, He would suffer, and He would face His death, but then rise on the third day. Nothing must distract Him from achieving this because that is why He came into the world. He sends His disciples on ahead of Him and the first place they enter is a Samaritan village where He is met with stiff rejection. Strategy and good planning do not immune any leader from encountering bottlenecks. In His determination, He overcame the temptation by refusing to descend so low as to compromise the demands of true leadership for popularity. Instead, He rebukes His disciples, James and John who want to call down fire from heaven to burn up their opposers. He made them continue on their way, thus teaching us that rejection and opposition should not be unexpected, but a good leader should never yield to them. We yield when we take vengeance. But this distracts us from the goal because we have looked back. This destroys our path to progress. Are you vengeful? Leave vengeance to God.

Like Jesus, we too as pilgrims are invited on a journey and Jerusalem is our goal. We must never lose sight of it, come rain, come sunshine. Others wanted to come but Christ told them that this journey is vigorous... 'the son of man has nowhere to lay His head'. To follow Him, we also must be prepared and continue to look forward toward our goal. That means having the determination to fight off the pressures we have from those around us enticing us to give in to the abuse of our liberty in the pursuit and celebration of vice and sin. Let us pray that we all may be led by the Spirit to overcome self-indulgence and be able to live in true love with God and with one another. Amen.