

Homily 13th Sunday of the Year C
John the Baptist Parish Feast Day

Happy Feast Day celebration, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord! As we mark this wonderful weekend, the readings direct our minds to the nature of God's call to serve. John the Baptist, whose spirituality we imitate, was exemplary in his attitude to service. One of his famous lines is "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). He displayed service in humility, stating, "[His] sandals, I am not worthy to stoop down and untie" (Mark 1:7). This same spirit is the driving force of our attitude to serve as members of John the Baptist family.

The undeniable truth is that we serve God through our love of neighbor. The Second Reading (Gal 5:1, 13-18) states, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" Our neighbors in this context are the members of the Church. All the ministries in our parish are actively alive; a wonderful display of the stewardship of time, talent and treasure. Many of us serve both as individuals and also within a group situation in the Men's Club, the Women's Altar and Rosary Society, the Knights of Columbus, the Drama group, as catechists, the choir, ushers, lectors, altar servers, food pantry, etc.

Certainly, many of us have certain constraints, but God's call involves sacrifices. It may hamper the time for playing golf, watching TV, and other recreational activities. God "needs" your service to his Church and has promised to bless you. See the way Jesus displays how to answer God's call. In our Gospel passage (Luke 9:51-62), as his death was approaching, "He resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem." Even when he knew he was going to suffer and to die, he yielded to the will of the Father. St. Paul emulated Jesus' resolute determination:

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:22-24).

God's call respects human freedom. St. Paul enjoins us today, "For you were called for freedom... But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love." Notice how, in our Gospel passage, the Samaritans used their freedom wrongly. They collectively opposed the mission of Jesus by declining to let him go through their village to Jerusalem. The disciples, James and John, were infuriated and asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to

consume them?" But "Jesus turned and rebuked them..." Let us readily offer to work with Christ at any given opportunity.

In God's call, certain ministerial or administrative areas are reserved to only those chosen by God (cf. Heb 5:4-5). Concerning Elisha, God told Elijah (1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21), "You shall anoint Elisha... as prophet to succeed you." Notice how, in our Gospel passage, someone had volunteered and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus declined, saying, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." In essence, "I have no room to keep you?" The one he wanted (cf. Mark 3:13), he called and insisted, "Follow me." This person tried to defer the call to a later date, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father". But Jesus insisted, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." God wants us to make Him a priority in our lives. He does not accept a second place; and He is not a distraction or an obstacle to our way of life. It is a privilege to be called to serve.

We must always respond with a clear heart. God knows our inner motives, thoughts of "acceptance" or "rejection." Notice the similarity between the response of Elisha in the First Reading and that of "Another" in the Gospel. Elisha

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said, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you." The other person in the gospel said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Jesus retorted, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." Why was Elisha approved whereas this person was not? Re-

member the similarity between the question addressed to the Archangel Gabriel by the priest Zachariah and also by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Why was Mary approved and Zachariah made mute? Beloved, God cannot be deceived; He knows the secret intentions of our hearts.

Let us always live by the spirit. The human aspect may want to decline, even where our spirit is willing (cf. Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38). Hence, St. Paul stated, "For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want." Prayer is indispensable to help us do God's work as God wants it. Finally, the sacraments and sacramentals have their place in answering God's call. See how the cloak of Elijah elicited vocation interest in Elisha. Thus, the sacraments and sacramentals energize us to respond and be committed to God in our respective parish ministries. Do not neglect your liturgical and sacramental life. May God fill us now and always. Amen! St. John the Baptist, pray for us!