

Get a life! That's one of our popular sayings these days; we hear it a lot. *Get a life!* ... The Shunemite woman in today's First Reading literally gets a life. The prophet Elisha works a miracle for her: a pregnancy -- she gets a life. She gets a life because of the hospitality she shows to Elisha. She recognized holiness in him, that he's a bearer of God's word, and that God acts through him. And so she gives him a meal whenever he passes through her town, and eventually provides him with a place to stay. Her hospitality pays off. Looks like hospitality and faith go together.

In the Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples on how to get a life. His directions for getting it sound pretty sharp. It's a two-step dance: Step One is you have to make Jesus Number One in your life. He says quite bluntly that we have to love him more than our families. He's not on an ego-trip. He clears it up a few verses later when he says that He and the Father are one: "whoever receives me receives the one who sent me," God the Father. And God has first claim on each one of us, because like Psalm 100 says, "He made us, we belong to him."

Making Jesus Number One in our lives doesn't mean ignore everybody else, it doesn't degrade the other people in our lives: God loves each one of them completely, too, for eternity. What Jesus is saying is recognize that God is the source of Life and Love, He has the prior claim on us. He's the foundation, the springboard for all of our other relationships: in marriage, in family, in work or school, in friendships, in recreation, in everything and everyone. Then we can enjoy all of the goodness of those people and things so much better. If you love God first, you're united with him and with everyone else who's united with the Lord. The love for your family has its full home in your shared love of the Lord.

So Step One to getting a Life: make Jesus first. Step Two: give yourself away for others. God created us out of love; God expects us to share the love He's given us. Our relationships with others tell us what our relationship with God is; they reveal if we've made

Jesus Number One or not. If it's all about me, if you make yourself number one, you will lose your life. But if God is Number One, and we give ourselves away for others, lose ourselves for others – serving others, helping others – we will find Life, eternal life. This is not about depriving ourselves, but about being generous, just as God is generous with us.

That's the two-step dance of the cost of discipleship.

One of the ways we express that we're disciples is by extending hospitality to guests, visitors and strangers. That's when we realize we're all God's children, we're all in God's family. So give a friendly and welcome reception here to guests, visitors and strangers. That's how we welcome Christ in others. It's how Jesus ends today's Gospel: "whoever receives you, receives me ... and the one who sent me." Make people feel that they belong here, that they're part of our great parish family. Smile! Laugh! This church isn't a morgue: we celebrate Mass here.

Don't ignore someone you don't know or recognize. If someone looks uncomfortable, introduce yourself. ... If you're sitting at the end of a pew, let others in. If you don't want to move down, please stand to let them through, or better yet, step out of the pew and let them in with a smile. You may have no idea how much you hurt us when you don't let someone in a pew, or act like you own a space. Most people who experience this usually doesn't come back to the church; our parish doesn't get a second chance at hospitality. Statistically, it's the #1 reason people don't return.

And volunteer to be a Greeter here. Greeters are the #1 reason, statistically, why people join a church; it's what they're looking for. And we have so many wonderful people here! Let your light shine, share your smile with others. You only have to be here 15 minutes before Mass starts. Call our parish office and volunteer to be a Greeter.

Make Christ the center of your life; give yourself away for others; show hospitality. You will find Life now and forever. Discipleship has its rewards.

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