

The first point Jesus makes in today's Gospel is that He wants to be the center and focus of our lives. Everything and everyone else has to take second place.

Jesus isn't saying that family members shouldn't be loved, but that He should be loved more. Because if you love the Lord, you're united with everyone else who's united with the Lord. The love you have for your child, the love you have for your spouse or your mother or father, are all the better for it, when you share love of the Lord.

There are dangers to forgetting that. We can love a person too much, when we think they're everything, that we're nothing without them. Then that person becomes an idol, a false god. Parents will suffocate a child if that child becomes their everything; they won't turn out well for it. Or we can love a spouse or girlfriend or boyfriend too much, and then find ourselves in an abusive relationship, because they realize they can control us or manipulate us.

The next thing Jesus says is take up your cross and follow me. He's not talking about sucking it up, in general. The cross means the difficulties and challenges that come from following Jesus, from living our faith. In our nation at this time, carrying our cross is not so much about physical pain as it is emotional pain: when living our faith causes us to be excluded in some circles, or avoided by others; or rejected; or laughed at, like Jesus often was. We can bear it, this price of discipleship, of putting Christ first, because there's a payoff, rewards.

The whole last half of today's Gospel is about rewards. God rewards those who are faithful. When we do good for other believers, we'll be rewarded. Hospitality yields rewards. When we serve other disciples, when we serve those who are serving the Lord, we are serving the Lord himself. We see an example of that in our First Reading.

The prophet Elisha needs some water and food and a childless wife shows him hospitality; she provides for his needs. For her kindness, the prophet promises her the reward of a child who can provide for her when her husband dies. Our Reading stops before we get to hear that happy ending: she's given a son the next year.

These days we have concerns about strangers and security, so regular hospitality might seem too risky for us to practice. But I would say hospitality is the same thing as charity, and there are many ways we can practice that safely.

Today's Gospel is about putting Christ first in our lives and relationships. So let's take stock this week of our priorities, of what's holding back our friendship with God, if anything's interfering with it. I'll suggest three questions we might ask ourselves and then act on:

Are there any time-wasters in my life? The coronavirus restrictions may have led us to watch too many TV shows, or to spend way too much time on Facebook or other websites.

Am I involved in any unhealthy relationships that bring me down or hold me back?

Do I care about material things too much?

Today's Gospel is about loving Christ best, and following Christ by carrying our cross and living our faith even when it costs us in our relationships, and finding our reward by giving ourselves to help other disciples, I'll sum it all up by saying:

Jesus will take care of us, if we focus on caring for him, through caring for others.

Fr. John Ozella, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
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