

Homily for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

Sometimes at first sight it is very difficult to understand, or perhaps even to accept some of the sayings of Christ that we find in the Gospels.

We have this mental picture, this view of Christ, as being a kind man, compassionate and understanding, and then suddenly we come across something like these two very hard sayings in today's gospel, and it doesn't seem to be consistent with the image of Christ that we have.

It always pays in a situation like that to reread the passage very clearly and try to see what He was getting at.

In the first, He said "Leave the dead to bury the dead". In the second, He said "Once the hand is laid to the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God".

Now, there seems to be two separate situations here, involving two separate people who wanted to give themselves to Christ. Something about Christ and something about His teachings appealed to them and they were prepared to offer their lives in His service.

But something stopped them and at the last moment they made an excuse.

The first young man realised his duty to his ageing father and said that he would remain with him until he died, he would then bury him, and then, free from family and domestic ties, he would be able to follow Christ.

The second man seemed to be free from such obligations, but perhaps he had brothers and sisters, and all he wanted to do was have time to say goodbye to them.

Both got a very sharp reply from Christ.

The point I think that Christ was trying to get across was that love of God comes first.

Remember that both young men were probably Jews, and as such, they strictly observed the Law and the Commandments.

The First Commandment told them that the love and worship of God took precedence over everything else, and the Fourth Commandment told them to honour their parents. There was no clash or conflict there, as probably no situation had arisen in their lives which meant a decision as to which actually did take precedence. Life just went on. One did one's duty to God and to one's family.

But, here and now, a new situation arose. A Man who claimed that He himself was God, God made Man, preaching a new gospel, and making new demands. God Himself was now in front of them, saying, "Here I am now a living, breathing reality, and I'm going to ask you in a very concrete way to put into practise those Commandments that you have obeyed. I have asked for your love and worship in theory, now I want it in reality. I have told you that I must come first, now I shall put you to the test".

This incident in Christ life was inserted by the author St Luke to get a particular point across, that God comes first.

He does and has made demands on us as His creatures, and it is getting this relationship between God and ourselves right that is the foundation of a well-ordered life.

If we get this right, everything else falls into place. God first and then all other created things second.

It is as simple and as complicated as that.

There shouldn't really be too much, if indeed any stress or tension between the demands of God and those of everyday life.

Indeed, one cannot love God if one does not love and respect those people around us.

The way that we treat and deal with our fellow human beings should complement and fall into line with our duties and obligations towards God.

If a situation confronts you in your life that seems to contradict this, then it needs closer scrutiny. The result must be the same, God first and then all other things fall into their proper place.

Both young men in the Gospel loved those around them and naturally they placed them before any love for God.

If the lessons of today's gospel are heard then it is God first, the love of God first, then it must follow that we should teach ourselves how to love God, to love His will for us, to love His ways.

It is not much use giving a begrudging service or obedience to the will of God, as though all the dice were loaded on His side, and we cannot win. The response that we must give him has to be a loving one.

It is hard to love something abstract, that you cannot see, smell, touch or taste, so we each have to work at it to practise this loving relationship with God.

The more effort we make, the more sensitive we become to the demands of God upon us.

It is only perhaps in this way that we can avoid the situation of confrontation that the young men in today's Gospel experienced.

By seeing, knowing and loving God, any alternatives or oppositions cease to exist. It is God first and then all other things in their proper place.