

THE EMMAUS SERIES

13th Sunday, Year A

2 Kings 4: 8-11, 14-16

Romans 6: 3-4, 8-11

Matthew 10: 37-42

Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it

On the last two Sundays, our gospel readings have brought us the instructions of the Saviour for those he calls to share in the mission he has received from his Father. Today's reading is the conclusion of the passage we have been reading. Not surprisingly, it takes us to the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Our life as disciples has its beginning in our personal call to follow Jesus. Now he speaks to us of the nature of the relationship he has called us to.

It is a unique relationship – the absolute allegiance to which only God has a right. The original words of Jesus would have used the stark contrast of Semitic expressions – the disciple who 'loves' the Saviour must 'hate' those of their families (cf. Lk 14:26). In presenting these words of Jesus, Matthew removes the danger of misunderstanding. A right relationship with the Saviour will not destroy our human relationships, but deepen them and make them more wholesome. Even the greatest of these, however, must not compromise the allegiance we owe to the Lord – even if this allegiance brings a sharing in his cross, through persecution and rejection. For the community that gave us Matthew's gospel, these words would have had practical implications. The following of Christ would have divided some families, and would have been met with hatred from those who used to be their friends in the synagogue.

But if Jesus calls for the allegiance that is owing to the Lord himself, he assures us – in words that ring with the fullness of his divine authority – that our absolute trust in him will never be misplaced; it will lead us to the fullness of life. This assurance of the Lord would have been a great source of inspiration to the Church of the beginning. (As we have seen, the Saviour's commission was given to the apostles as representatives of the whole community of disciples. This is made very clear in Luke's gospel, in which this call to absolute allegiance is addressed to the 'great crowds that accompanied Jesus on his way' [Lk 14:25].)

In the continuation of the text, Jesus promises those who generously entrust their lives to him, that - as they share in his mission – they will already begin to know the reward he promises. In the Jewish society of the time of Jesus, emissaries authorised to carry out a special commission were owed the respect owing to the one by whom they were commissioned. Applying this principle, Jesus promises those who carry out his mission will share in the 'welcome' owing to his coming, and the coming of his Father, through them. It is an experience that is familiar to all unselfish bearers of the gospel.

Paul's magnificent text, from the letter to the Romans - explaining the mystery of 'baptism in Christ Jesus' - is a perfect complement to the gospel reading. 'Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it', Jesus tells us. The life he promises is nothing less than a sharing in the everlasting life manifested to the world in his resurrection. The crucified One – who came to share in the life of a world lost in selfishness and violence – has been 'raised from the dead' by the Father's glorious power, to become a sign of hope and a source of new life for the whole of creation. It is through our baptism that we are united to Jesus in the mission he received from his Father, and begin to share in all that has been realised in his resurrection – 'dead to sin, but alive for God in Christ Jesus'.

John Thornhill sm