

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the blessing rewarded to generous hearts and hospitable people. They show that any act of kindness, compassion and sympathy shown to others will never remain without recompense before God. They invite us to open our hearts and hands to the poor, the needy and the deprived.

The first reading shows how a barren woman, who was hospitable to the prophet Elisha, was blessed by God with a son. It equally shows the grandeur of the woman's heart as she welcomed the prophet to her home anytime he was in mission. Finally, the text reports the reaction of Elisha and his promise to the woman about the child to be born of her.

What is behind this text is the idea that any act of charity shown to our fellow human beings will always receive its reward. There is also the idea that God is not indifferent to the ways we live and what we do in order to help each other. The last idea is related to the truth that God is hidden in our brothers and sisters, especially those who are in need.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of the recompense given to those who do good to others because they belong to him. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' statement that whoever loves his members of family more than him is not worthy of him. Then, it reports another statement of Jesus in which he says that whoever does not take up his cross and follow him is not worthy of him, as well as whoever finds his life loses it and vice versa.

The Gospel ends up with Jesus saying that whoever receives him, receives the one who sent him, as well as whoever receives a prophet or a righteous man receives a corresponding reward. Finally, the Gospel states another declaration of Jesus saying that whoever gives only a cup of water to one of his disciples will receive a reward.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the virtue of hospitality. What do I want to say by that? Before explaining, let me first of all refer to this experience we all do. In fact, as human beings, we have various and different needs, some of which have to do with our health, others with our sustenance and still others with our clothing, etc.

Those needs are inevitable and their satisfaction is vital for the balance of our life and the enhancement of our happiness. Anytime that we cannot satisfy our needs, in one way or another, there will be a kind of frustration within us. One would even say that everything we do in this world has to do with the satisfaction of our needs.

However, one thing is to recognize human needs and another is to have enough means in order to satisfy them. In truth, there is always a gap between the needs and the means people possess. Even for the rich people, the gap still exists, because it turns out that in a very paradoxical way the means create the needs.

Why do I tell this whole story? I do it in order to draw our attention to the fact that it is not natural to give away what we possess because most of the time we are caught up in the mind-game of needs and means. And as there is a gap between them, we will be always asking questions before giving. But, if we do it, in spite of this gap, God blesses us because there we show that we come close to his heart and imitate his deeds.

That is why in the first reading, Elisha the prophet did not hesitate to invoke God's blessing on the woman who was hospitable to him. It is for the same reason that Jesus speaks of the reward that those who come to the help of his disciples will receive.

The question to ask naturally is: why shall we help others in their needs or be hospitable to people? According to today's Gospel, three reasons impel us to do so. First, there is the willingness to bear the cross. In fact, by giving to others, it sometimes hurts because we deprive ourselves of something we would have used for our sake. In that sense, by giving to others we show our love of Jesus and bear our cross in following him. At the same time, we give a vivid witness that we have heard him speaking to us, we have taken seriously his words and we want to act on them.

Second, by giving to others, we give to God who is hidden in the needy and the poor. At the same time, by receiving those people in the name of our faith in Jesus, we receive his Father who has blessed us so much by giving us all those things we enjoy in this world. That is why Jesus says "whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me".

Third, by giving to others it is Jesus himself we are helping with our material things. But as Jesus is not ungrateful, he will reward us for our acts of charity and hospitality. That is the reason why Jesus says, "Whoever gives only cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward".

For those evident reasons, we should never regret a good deed. Even if people do not show appreciation, we should keep doing good. If we have done something good to someone even if he does not say thank you, we have to be thankful to God. We have done only what our faith in Jesus has compelled us, knowing well that Jesus and the Father will reward us.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to recognize that all the material things we enjoy in this world had been given to us by him. Let us ask him to touch our hearts and our minds so that we open our hands to the needy without looking at our own needs or counting the cost. God bless you all!

2 Kings 4: 8-11, 14-16a; Romans 6: 3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10: 37-42



Homily Date: July 02, 2017
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20170702homily.pdf