

Opening the Word: The prophet speaks



It is natural to develop affection for those closest to us. We share communion, made possible through a history of mutual affection, with our parents, children and siblings.

Jesus' words to the apostles force us to consider anew the integrity of this natural communion: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37).

Now, we may hear these words, and say to ourselves, "OK, not so hard." After all, it is possible to have a place in one's heart for parents, children and Jesus.

But, Jesus' next words in Matthew suggest that love for him may come at the cost of those natural relationships. He tells us to take up our cross and follow him. He teaches us that to find our life requires that we lose it.

The reason there may be a conflict between our natural affections and the cross is that those who follow Jesus must show hospitality to the prophet and righteous man. Just as the noble woman showed concern for the prophet Elisha, we are to welcome those who speak in Christ's name.

The dilemma is that those who speak in the name of Christ, those who live according to God's measure of justice, are not always harmonious guests. The prophet speaks the truth of the divine word to those who do not want to hear it. The righteous man reveals to us our own unrighteousness.

June 28 – Thirteenth
Sunday in ordinary
Time

2 Kgs 4:8-11, 14-16
Ps 89:2-3, 16-17,
18-19
Rom 6:3-4, 8-11
Mt 10:37-42

In the history of Israel, prophets tend to be run out of town, exiled, their life sought because of their commitment to God's word. The righteous are mocked by all the unjust, who get ahead in life stepping on the heads of the widow and orphan.

In Matthew, this history for Jesus is not abstract. His life is sought. His righteousness is mocked. He is crucified.

Thus welcoming the righteous prophet, Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, requires that we heed his challenging words. And it is never easy to listen to the voice of a prophet who comes to interrupt a communion that is too comfortable.

Over the last several weeks, in our cities, Christ's voice has been speaking through people of color. Our country, and often enough our beloved Church, have not been hospitable to black and brown bodies.

Instead of a cup of cold water, our beloved brothers and sisters have too often been excluded from our common life, subject to violent and racist speech, and given a knee to the neck and a gun to the head.

The voice of Christ speaking through the laments of our neighbors must be heard. It is not easy to welcome the righteous prophet. It requires that we examine how our love can be too focused on those like us. It necessitates the conversion of heart, mind and body. We must change.

Our Lord is challenging us this day to make room for black and

brown lives. Just as we listen to the righteous voice of the unborn, we must attune ourselves to the speech of those crying out against racism.

This deeper communion, grounded in Christ, is what Our Lord makes possible on the cross. He bestows it to us every day in giving his own body and blood to us, inviting us to create a space to welcome him.

And now, he invites us in the same way to a deeper communion with our suffering neighbor.

This communion matters, because it is the communion to which the human family has been called through the prophetic speech and deeds of Our Lord.

Let's receive these prophets, even if it means that we have to change.

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