

**This Sunday's Readings – the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time** –The main theme of today's readings is discipleship.

The first reading is from the Book of Kings. The two Books of Kings, as the name implies, is a history of the Jewish monarchy from King Solomon (approximately 961 BCE) to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The books were written sometime during the Babylonian captivity and were edited any number of times. In this particular reading, Elijah (whose name means “my God is Yahweh”) is told by God to select Elisha, a simple farmer, to succeed him as prophet. Elijah prophesied during the reign of Ahab, King of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), from 869 – 850 BCE. Ahab had married a foreigner, Jezebel, who worshipped the Canaanite god Baal. Soon Queen Jezebel had replaced the Lord with Baal in Israel. She also killed all the prophets of the Lord. Elijah was sent by the Lord to rectify the situation. This he did (see 1 Kings Chapter 18). What is unique here is that nowhere in the Old Testament is a prophet's successor chosen. Yahweh chose Elisha to be Elijah's successor. Note that Elisha was plowing his field with 12 oxen. The more oxen a person owned, the more prominent the family, which would indicate that Elisha came from a wealthy family. Also note that there were 12 oxen, the same number as the tribes of Israel. Once Elijah placed his cloak on Elisha, Elisha knew exactly what he had to do. He gave up his former life and followed Elijah. He gave up everything to become a prophet of God.

Today's Gospel reading is from Luke. This Gospel reading marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry. It marks the end of the Galilean ministry and marks the beginning of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. Fr. Roger Karban in his 2007 syndicated column adds this very interesting comment on this reading – “At the time Luke composed his gospel, Jerusalem was just a heap of ruins. Titus' Roman army had wiped it off the face of the earth 15 years earlier. No longer was the Jewish capital geographically important. Its destruction provided the evangelist with an opportunity to "spiritualize" the city. For Luke, Jerusalem represents wherever and whenever Christians die, rise and receive the Holy Spirit in their lives. That's why he created a "journey narrative." Our lives of faith are a constant journey to a dying, rising and spirit-filled experience. That's also why we must pay close attention to what happens at the beginning of the actual biblical journey”. This reading is in two parts. The first part is the Samaritan incident. Remember that Samaria lies between Galilee to the north and Judea to the South. The Jews and the Samaritans did not like each other, which is an understatement. Because Jesus and His disciples wanted to pass through Samaria to go to Jerusalem, the Samaritans would not welcome them and they had to travel by another longer route. Reginald H. Fuller in his *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* adds this comment on James' and John's suggested punishment of the Samaritans – “The suggestion of James and John that fire should be called down from heaven to punish the Samaritans who would not receive Jesus “because his face was set toward Jerusalem” recalls their nickname, “Sons of thunder” (*Boanerges*). Recently attempts have been made to associate Jesus with the Zealots, the revolutionary liberationists of the day. That several of Jesus' disciples (for example, Simon the Zealot) had Zealot sympathies cannot be doubted. It seems probable that Jesus felt the constant temptation to seek an easy way out for his mission by adopting the Zealot line (O. Cullmann). But this was for him

precisely that, a temptation, and one that he constantly resisted and that brought him, humanly speaking, to the cross. He turns and rebukes James and John”! The second part is on discipleship. Along the way He asks some to follow Him as His disciples and some ask to be His disciples. However, none of them truly understand what it is to be a disciple of Jesus. It must be total conversion, total commitment, and a total transformation, just as Elisha did in the first reading. Jesus is quite clear about this as we see in His response to the last person who wanted to follow Him – “No one who sets hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God”. You must completely leave your old life to follow Jesus.

John J. Pilch in his *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle C* helps us understand the cultural differences between Samaritans and Judeans – “While Matthew’s Jesus commands his disciples to “enter no town of the Samaritans” (10:5), Luke’s Jesus rebukes these same disciples who would call down fire from heaven upon inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:55). He rejects this “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” mentality. Further, Luke creates and inserts a “good” Samaritan into a story whose traditional cultural progression required a Judean layperson as the third character, after the priest and Levite (Luke 10:25-37). In addition, Luke’s Jesus exhibits special sensitivity to the Samaritan leper among the ten cleansed (17:11-19) by omitting the recommendation of “offering the prescribed sacrifice” as in Matthew 8:2. The Samaritan gift would not be welcome in the Jerusalem Temple. Finally, in Acts 8:5-8, 14-17 Luke adopts a clever strategy to persuade alienated kin—Samaritans and Judeans—to be reconciled. In Luke’s story line the Samaritans believed the word preached by the Hellenist Philip but received the Spirit from the Judeans Peter and John. This artificial separation of the Spirit from baptism is Luke’s intentional strategy for stirring Samaritan respect for and loyalty to Jerusalem and Judeans. It also aims at improving understanding between Judeans and Samaritans. For contemporary American believers, this thumbnail sketch of historical relationships between Judeans and Samaritans and Luke’s masterful efforts at reconciliation poses this challenge: should we allow cultural and historical differences to divide us? Is there only one way to serve God? or to love Jesus? or to be Christian? Who or what can help us appreciate the integral and rightful place in the Christian community of those culturally different from us?”

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