

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 27-28, 2020

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

The common thread in today's readings centers upon the importance of fostering a welcoming spirit in all our relations with others. In particular, we were given a fascinating account from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Kings, a book filled with interesting characters and stories. One such character is Elisha, who had the unenviable position of succeeding Elijah as prophet in Israel.

Recall, Elijah had been carried off into heaven in a whirlwind, riding in a chariot of fire. This led to the common belief that he would return again; some even confused the identity of Jesus, thinking that he was Elijah come back in the flesh. Elisha had a tough act to follow.

In our account today, Elisha encounters a well-to-do family, who invite him into their home. They become friends. It is most likely that she did not know his identity; she believes he is a holy man, and recognizing this she invited him to dinner, also providing lodging whenever he passed by.

She did this while asking nothing in return. Here, it is Elisha who takes the initiative, asking if anything can be done. What is not included in today's passage is the fact that she initially refuses any help. It was Elisha's servant who knew her situation and makes mention that she is childless. Most likely she was embarrassed, for in ancient Israel to be childless was considered a failure. God must have frowned upon you, was that common though understanding.

Elisha follows through and promises her a son by the next year. Was God rewarding her for her kindness and hospitality? Possibly. But what is more important to notice is that she did not seek favors for herself. It came as a surprise, she even said in the very next sentence after the end of the lectionary passage- "My lord, you are a man of God; do not deceive your servant." It is easy to imagine her skepticism. She did not want someone playing with her emotions; she had been let down too many times.

But here, she was speaking with God's anointed, his prophet. We witness unsolicited kindness, unbounded and unaffected by any greed or ambition. Is there a lesson in this for us?

It reminds me of the story my brother once told me about the senior doctor in charge of new interns at the Mayo Clinic. He was fresh out of medical school. It was a late Friday afternoon in a hot summer, around the time to go home after a long week.

The doctor said to an intern, "I know it's late but would you by any chance have time to check in upon a sheik from Saudi Arabia?" Mayo often receives VIP patients. "Oh, surely I would doctor," came the response. "Good... then you also have time to see a farmer from Kenyon. He is down the hall in room # 312. Lesson learned. Hospitality.

To be welcoming means looking behind personal gain and treating all people as important. Every person is of infinite value in God's eyes. Jesus reminds us "...he who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me." The act of kindness needn't be a major gesture. What about reaching out to those in your neighborhood who may be isolated in these past months, especially the elderly. Check in on them, make a phone call.

The Shunammite woman made a decision to interrupt her daily routine in order to reach out to somebody else. She was rewarded for her goodness, but even if we are not rewarded now, our actions bear witness to God's initial offer of love to us.

God always takes the initiative with us. We should do the same and follow the woman's example. Sadly, we never learn the name of the Shunammite woman. An oversight on the part of the sacred author? Yes, quite likely. On the other hand, perhaps she represents in a general way, all those people in our lives who were especially kind to us and patient with us, making us feel welcome. May we add our own names to that list.