

Homily 13th Sunday, Year C: 1 Kgs 19:16.19-21; Gal 5:1.13-18; Lk 9:51-52

Introduction

The first reading of our mass relates to the call of Elisha. By throwing his cloak over him, Elijah demonstrates the transfer of power. In slaughtering the oxen and burning the plough, he was precluding a return to his old way of life. Jesus demands a similar response to us who are his followers. In today's liturgy, Jesus demands a total commitment to the kingdom values.

Homily

At a stage during the peak of the troubles in Northern Ireland, Jackie Hewitt was Chairman of the Shankill community Council. He was driving back to Belfast from Millisle on the Atrim coast, where he had been at a war memorial ceremony. He was listening to a car radio when the news came in that a bomb had gone off on the Shankill road (that was a loyalist area), and that three people were dead. Blinded by anger, he thought to himself, 'that is it! We need a bomb on the Falls road (nationalist area).

As he neared the city, he heard another news flash on a radio, seven people were now believed dead. And he thought to himself, 'we need two bombs on the falls'. But when he got the scene, and stood amidst the grief and anger of his community, his own thoughts haunted him. He says 'When I heard other people saying what I was thinking, then it frightened me'.

At the time of Jesus, the Samaritans and the Jews were mutual enemies. So, when the inhabitants of that Samaritan village heard that Jesus was heading for Jerusalem, they refused to receive him. James and John were indignant. They howled for revenge. They wanted Jesus to hit back, to call fire from heaven on the entire village. Wow! You see, the problem of tribalism did not start today. Whatever they might think of Jesus as a person, as an individual, he was from another tribe, so he does not really belong. They would have nothing to do with him, because he was a Jew.

But Jesus refused to be clannish or tribalistic or unduly emotional. He chose not to be sectarian. Against the wish of James and John, he chose to be inclusive. Paul was another classic example of a man who refused to be clannish. He once challenged Peter for playing the ostrich on one occasion. Refusing to identify with the gentles for fear of the so called superior class, the Jews who had a religious obligation not to associate with the non-Jews. To think of tribalism among the apostles, that is outrageous, but it sounds like it did happen. According to their way of thinking, those who oppose us are not just God's enemies but ours also. As far as Jesus was concerned, the issue of punishment for those who rejected him did not arise, he rose above tribalism, sectarianism and being clannish. He refused to get involved in vengeful and clandestine activities. He ran an open house, a house of love. If only Christians of our generation can learn from our Lord Jesus Christ. It demands courage and strength not to retaliate or avenge wrongs. "Solidarity was a non violent liberation movement formed by ship-yard workers of Gdansk in Poland during the Nazi and the communist era. Its leader, Lech Walesa said that it became successful because of its principle and policy against violence, brutality and hatred. They always sought for alternatives to these. Evil must be resisted but not by doing further evil, not by vengeance and violence. No way! Escalation of evil can be checked or stopped if it is not passed on or instigated.

We are invited to follow or toe the part of love, peace and goodness. Like Elisha, let us commit ourselves wholly, completely and absolutely to this end. Let there be no going back or no looking back. A true story was told in an autobiography titled 'An only child' by an Irish writer Frank O'Connor. In this fine book, he recalls vividly how he decided to become a writer. He had lost his job with the grand southern railway and he had no money. His neighbors regarded him as a mad good for nothing fellow. He said he decided to prove that he was neither mad nor a good for nothing fellow. He said he realized that no-matter what it would cost him, there was no going back or retraction of that resolve. He said 'I tossed my cap over the wall of life and I knew I must follow it to wherever it had fallen. Jesus tells us today **"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"**.