

**Homily for June 30, 2002
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

By Father Charles Bowes

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

Following the Lord can cost us even the love by which we came to know God.

“Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me,” says Jesus in Matthew chapter 10. What’s even worse in the parallel passage, Luke 14: “If anyone come to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Now that sure flies full in the face of how many of us come to God in the first place. It’s impossible for me to enumerate how many times people have described to me how they have come to know God and God’s love precisely through the love of another person – family member, spouse, friend. What’s this all about? Does Christianity become truly inhuman?

These passages are not about how we come to God through love. These passages are not about rejection of the reality of how God touches one person through another. These passages in Saint Matthew and in Saint Luke are about what it takes to evangelize, what it takes to share the faith – it can cost everything – it can cost even the love by which we came to know and love God.

This passage of Saint Matthew’s gospel and the parallel passage in Saint Luke were products of the early Church, who were engaged in persecution while trying to share the faith. Many of the members of the early Church experienced being ostracized by their families and communities because of their faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, the very people from whom they learned to know God through their Jewish tradition became their bitter enemies and persecutors when these early followers of “the way” began to follow Jesus. These passages in Saint Matthew and in Saint Luke were designed to give support and encouragement to those undergoing persecution in their efforts to evangelize those whom they loved and who rejected them.

Perhaps as we look back on our lives we can find instances of how we separated from those we loved as we grew in faith and in understanding. In my own life, I can remember being educated in the Northeastern United States and returning to the South to find I no longer fit in with the racial prejudice of my own family. And yet it was that very family that enabled me to be sensitive to what was just and right.

As I continue to reflect on the sexual abuse scandal in our tradition, this gospel brings home to me

how we become evangelized by people who we would not expect. In this instance, the world is evangelizing the Church in terms of the sexual abuse scandal. The Church is learning from those in the public sector what is expected in terms of the behavior of those who are given a sacred trust – the care of children. Policies have to change, systems within the Church have to change in response to what the Church is learning from those who are not even Christian, but who have in some way been influenced by a society formed in no small measure by the teachings of Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church.

Perhaps a lesson for all of us is that evangelization, God's movement of God's spirit to teach the world and to bring it to salvation, comes about from all sorts of sources and not just Christian ones, not just from the Church. The question continues, can the Church learn from its secular evangelizers? I hope and pray so. The truth is that no abuse is acceptable ever. No one should ever be placed at risk from a known offender – we know that now. We've learned and policies and practices need to reflect that insight.

One of the greatest obstacles to receiving God's message of love in our hearts is our preoccupation with ourselves and with our own concerns. A question out of which I pray through Jesus to the Father these days is a simple one: "Lord, how were you able to be open to change in your beliefs in order to know you were God's son? How did you come to know God in ways beyond your own Jewish tradition?"

We easily put ourselves at the center of the universe. The four-year-old girl, who is riding with her mother, spots the car of her aunt parked in front of the aunt's house. The child says to her mother: "There's Aunt Sally's car, and she is in her kitchen thinking about me!"

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