

## Spirit of Daring Freedom

There is a strange contrast in this Gospel: it begins with Jesus refusing to call down fire from heaven on those who did not accept him, which makes him appear very gentle, and it ends with Jesus summoning his followers to refuse even the ordinary social obligations to their families, which makes him appear very harsh. Are there any words in history harsher than, “Let the dead bury their dead!”? Of these two attitudes, which shows us the true Jesus, and which should we adopt for ourselves?

The true Jesus was not interested in projecting either gentleness or harshness as his characteristic stance toward people, because he accepted both. Jesus gave himself primarily neither to gentleness nor to harshness, but to love.

Whatever love required, he was willing to do.

Jesus was more free in this than we are. How often do we fail to help someone we love because we just cannot bring ourselves to say or do something that will hurt? We fail to challenge others to live up to their potential, and we fail to live up to our own, for fear of appearing harsh—and thereby fail to contribute to the life of this world what we could contribute. And so, the psychologists had to invent the phrase “tough love” to remind us that gentleness can sometimes destroy.

On the other hand, how many times do we wound and destroy because we fail to be gentle? We think that force will accomplish what love cannot, and so we raise our voices when we should lower them. We try to push our point across quickly when we should sit down and talk. Often enough, in our harshness toward those who do wrong, we are not really trying to help people; we are just trying to get out of our environment whatever evil or annoyance they are putting into it. We act, not out of love for others, but out of fear. First and foremost, we want to protect what is ours.

The second half of this Gospel addresses that. Jesus tells his followers that they must not cling to home and possessions, or to the sense of security a safe home gives. “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

He tells us we cannot put family bonds, or the sense

JUNE 26, 2022

13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Mark 5:21-43; Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24;  
2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

of belonging we find in close relationships within our own circle of friends, above the gift of ourselves to the world.

How often have we excluded someone who did not “fit in,” or did what was not right because we wanted to fit in ourselves? Jesus says, “Come away and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

There are times to be with family and friends—precious times. But there is also an acceptance of social obligation to family and friends that can be, in fact, divided loyalty. Jesus tells us that whenever we suspect that we might be hearing his call, nothing should hold us back.

The problem is our focus. When we think of what we are by Baptism—the Body of Christ, sharers in the life and mission of Jesus Christ, his embodied presence on earth—we want to give ourselves to the work of the kingdom. But then we let our minds and hearts focus on other very natural desires—desires for security, for the intimate closeness of family and friends, for acceptance by our group—and, “looking back,” we take our hand from the plow and forget Christ’s call to save the world with him.

The call of this Gospel is a radical call: It goes to the roots of our attitude toward life itself. And like all radical calls, it must be balanced. But before we can achieve balance between all the various attitudes and values of our life, we need to give each value its full weight. Our Lord calls us to a love gentle enough to endure all things without violence, yet strong enough to

stand against the whole world in loyalty to the work and ideals of the kingdom. That makes us a people of peace who accept to be at odds with the world.

## REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

---

### Thirteenth Week of the Year

***Pray daily:** Lord, you came to call us to live life and give life to the full. Teach me to love as you love, wanting only to bring all of those you love to the fullness of response to you. For this is life. Amen.*

**Monday:** Matthew 8:18-22: Jesus answered, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." How many social obligations do you go along with that are not life-giving to you or to anyone else?

**Tuesday:** Matthew 8:23-27: The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?" Are you so impressed with who Jesus really is that you will do absolutely anything for him? Are you impressed enough to spend some time with him every day?

**Wednesday:** Matthew 8:28-34: "The swineherds ran away and ... reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Thereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their district." Are you afraid to let Jesus be a part of everything you do? How do you include him in your social life, your student or professional activities? Do you explicitly invite him to come with you wherever you go?

**Thursday:** Matthew 9:1-8: Jesus asked, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'" Which do you want more: physical health or deliverance from the sins that hold you back from giving yourself to God without reserve? What do you most frequently ask Jesus to do for you?

**Friday:** Matthew 9:9-13: While Jesus was at table in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. Whom do you invite to your house? If you gave a party for Jesus, would you invite the same people? Would you be comfortable with the mix? How do you invite Jesus to be part of the din-

ners or parties you do give?

**Saturday:** Matthew 9:14-17: Jesus said, "People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined." What are you doing to make yourself the kind of person to whom Jesus can say anything? Is he being frank with you now? What is the latest challenge he has given you? What is the last thing he has asked you to do for him?

## LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

---

**As Christian:** Imagine Jesus standing in front of you saying, "Come, follow me." What is your first reaction?

**As Disciple:** Read the Vatican II document, "The Church in the Modern World" ("Gaudium et Spes"), looking for the way to harmonize radical response to the Gospel with full participation in the life of our society.

**As Prophet:** Ask yourself what you have been afraid to change in your family or social life, or in your student or professional activity, because of your fear of how others might react. Without being rash, weigh this in the light of Jesus' call to let nothing stand in the way of following him.

**As Priest:** Think of the last time you felt like "calling down fire from heaven" on someone who was wrong. Ask yourself what would be the gentle, respectful way to help that person change. Is this incompatible with "tough love"?

**As King:** Notice and identify the things in your environment that encourage the mediocrity of "not making waves." Call this working principle into question in conversation with others and by your own actions.