

c-c-13 Sunday of OT 2022

He takes the plough that he has been ploughing with,
cooks the oxen he has been ploughing with,
breaks it up,
and serves them to his neighbours

Without a team of oxen, and with any farming equipment,
he has no way to return to farming. In a sense he has no “plan B.”

But if both, burn their ploughs, and roast their oxen, so to speak,
symbolic of leaving their old life behind,
and start out on a new adventure together,
they will indeed have a long, joyful life together.

Remember what Jesus said, new wine will not fit into old wineskins.
If you try to reuse the old wineskins they will burst.
If we try and fit our new life with Christ, into our old life without Christ,
all that will happen is that we will end up bursting...it simply cannot be done.

The commitment we have towards him must take priority over all other commitments.

In this gospel Jesus is talking about the commitment that is demanded of his disciples.

Now I need to make a footnote.

While Jesus' words have a radical edge that must not be blunted,
if all Christians everywhere were to live this teaching literally,
we would constitute a family of happy, penniless, and homeless people,
surrounded by decomposing loved ones!

There is no dignity in poverty and most people who are poor,
while they can be rich in human values, do not want to stay poor.
What they deserve, and what all Christians should want, is economic and social justice.

But it is not just about money.

We are called to detach ourselves from memories,
which can be cluttered with anger and revenge;
from the demands of work,
which keep us from being with the ones we love;
and to be generous with our time, hospitality and compassion.

To appreciate what Jesus is talking about...the image he uses is a plough drawn by an ox.

I have talked to enough farmers to know that it is important to plough in a straight line.

If the farmer wishes to plough a straight furrow,
he must give his undivided attention and look ahead to what he is doing.
If he keeps looking back, he will not do a good job.

Having said that,

I must also say that we are called to mediate on the conflicts
that arise when our various commitments come into conflict.

Although committed to Christ we all have family responsibilities: children to raise,
elderly parents to take care of.

What does discipleship require of us, after all we must earn a living.
I don't think Jesus is asking everyone to leave their place of employment,
otherwise we would be penniless, and homeless.

But our commitment must be radical.

We cannot waste our time on revenge no matter how justified we think we might be.
We cannot daydream about glory,
we need to face the harshness of the path of Christ in an unloving world.
We cannot become committed to a way of life that kills the spirit,
and cloak it in a noble sounding language.

Because ultimately our decisions are meant to set us free.

This is what St. Paul was getting at in the second reading. He weighs into the discussion.
He notes that Christ has set us free.

Therefore stand firm, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

The implication is that prior to committing ourselves to Christ, we were slaves.

Admittedly, we would not call ourselves slaves,
but if we are focused on a material, emotional, or psychological point,
we are a slave to that idea.

If we are focused and committed to Christ,
and, Love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, body and soul,
and we love our neighbour as ourselves,
we are not a slave to an idea, we have been set free to live as we were created to live.

I am not saying that the road to freedom is easy.
Jesus lived the freest life that anyone ever lived,
but the goal of his life was not just to give us an example,
the goal of his life was to be “taken up.”

Ascension can only be reached by walking the road that leads to death and resurrection.
This is the road he had to travel, and it is also the road we must travel,
so that we can also be “taken up.”

Unfortunately along this road we will experience rejection.
Just as Jesus experience rejection in the Samaritan village.
But we cannot react to rejection in the same way as James and John—with more rejection.
We must react to rejection with love and compassion.
Remember Jesus’ command, “Love your enemies.”

(M) To all the families who are baptizing their children.
Your will be the task of teaching your children what it means to follow Christ.
The easy path is not always the best path.
Baptism starts your children on the journey. But it is only a beginning.
Your role as a parent does not stop until you have taken your last breath.
May God help you as you strive to teach your children the ways of the faith.