

June 26, 2022

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C

Bulletin Reflection Fr. Ed Smith

1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21; Galatians 5: 1, 13-18; Luke 9: 51-62

As some of you know, I keep my weekly articles for the bulletin numbered, and the one you are reading is number 573 for the parishes of Our Lord Christ the King and St. Stephen. This means that for 572 Sundays during the past eleven years I have written some thoughts about the weekend readings for you. This is my final one. At the end of June, I will be moving to St. Margaret of York and St. Columban Parishes in Loveland, Ohio, as one of the assistants to the new pastor there. It is hard for me to believe that, since I came here as your pastor in 2011, all these years have passed so quickly. I treasure so many memories of you and these remarkable parish communities. As some of you know, this was the first time in my priesthood that I was ever named a pastor. Before that, I was a high school teacher, a faculty member at the North American College in Rome, on our seminary faculty here in Cincinnati and ultimately rector and president of The Athenaeum of Ohio/Mount St. Mary's Seminary. As you can imagine, through all this, I had been waiting to become the pastor of a parish. It took twenty-nine years before it happened for me! And Christ the King and St. Stephen surpassed all my hopes and expectations. The kindness, acceptance, care and love that you have given to me has changed my life. You have made me a better priest. And now I must continue my journey elsewhere.

Providentially, in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus embarks on a journey Himself, and from this point on in the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus will be moving toward Jerusalem. It is there that the culmination of His life on earth will occur: His passion, death and resurrection. And as He begins this journey, He reminds His disciples that not only is the destination important, but that the journey itself is significant. He uses an extraordinary image to alert them to the importance of this pilgrimage: "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God." This is meant to shock the disciples...and us...into seeing the serious nature of our journey of faith. This journey, at times, may require us to be nearly heroic in our resolution to stay the course and not look back. We know all too well how easy it is to fall into the trap of looking at the past with regret for what we think we have lost, rather than keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the pioneer and exemplar of our faith. And so, we are given the image of putting our hand to the plow so that we do not forget the importance of keeping Him in our sight, following Him each day, helping to bring His Good News to others, and doing our part in becoming the people God created us to be. We are all on our own journeys, and sometimes they lead us to places we would not necessarily have chosen. But, if we trust that Jesus is the ultimate destination for all of us, then any change should not cause us to be afraid or despondent. No matter how confusing, questionable, or difficult we may think that the new direction of our life is, we know that we are not alone. Jesus is with us, guiding our feet into His way of peace, and calling us to bring His love to others in new ways.

God bless you, my dear friends. I will miss you so very much. Being with you has been one of the greatest joys of my priesthood and of my life. Please pray for me as I enter a new part of my journey. You remain in my heart, and I will always pray for you. Love, Fr. Ed