

13th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

Thursday of this past week I received a phone call from my younger brother, Harry, who said, “Dave, we just left the courtroom and the adoption is finally complete. Katie is officially ours.”

Well, there are no words to describe the joy of that news. After three miscarriages and one year of temporary custody, the child that they welcomed into their home on the second day of her life was now officially theirs.

Needless to say, Harry and Jean’s life is much different than a year or two ago. On the one hand there is a genuine sense of peace and fulfillment as they are living their dream as parents. And yet, on the other hand, there is an awesome responsibility entrusted to them.

It has been both interesting and inspiring watching this miracle unfold, and what is perhaps so striking is seeing how Harry and Jean’s focus has changed. Everyday, this couple lives not so much for themselves, but for their child. And together they will do whatever it takes for their daughter. In fact, my sister-in-law now has to work three days a week in Washington, DC for the next six months, and so for 72 hours each week my brother shoulders the responsibility alone – dressing, changing, feeding Kate, taking her to day care and picking her up.

When I stayed with him a couple weeks ago, I said, “Harry, you must be exhausted. How do you do it?” He said, “When you have a child, you do what you have to do.”

Suffice to say, when we live for someone, we will do whatever it takes, sometimes at great sacrifice, for the well-being of that person.

In today’s second reading, St. Paul speaks to the Romans and us about Baptism. He says, “Brothers and sisters: are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” We were buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might live in the newness of life. Then St. Paul offers some advice. He says, “Consequently, you, too, must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.”

The Word of God today reminds us of our Christian baptism and challenges us to live for God. But what does it mean to live for God?

Today’s Gospel from the 10th chapter of Matthew answers that question in a three-fold way.

First, to live for God is to make our relationship with him number one, in other words, the most important. For Jesus says, “Whosoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Jesus is not saying we should hate family, but rather we need to keep it in perspective. It’s only in letting go of family members in death that we come to understand the meaning of this teaching. In any case, to live for God is to make him the center of our lives. Our faith cannot be an afterthought or something squeezed in.

Second, to live for God is to embrace the cross, for Jesus says, “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.” While the cross symbolizes

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pain and suffering, sometimes innocent and unfathomable, it points to glory and resurrection. And as we carry our crosses it is heartwarming to know that Jesus has gone before us and that Jesus walks with us now. To live for him is to follow in his footsteps with a trusting love. You know, we cannot call ourselves true disciples unless we embrace the cross.

Finally, to live for God is to always extend hospitality. For Jesus says, “Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives only a cup of water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”

When we welcome the stranger we welcome Christ himself, for Jesus says, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters you do unto me.” This spirit of hospitality is more than just opening doors to others – it is really about opening our hearts. Many of us, in our humanness, resist this act of opening our hearts because of the risk of hurt. And yet, it is only when we open our heart that we really begin to live.

So this week, let us make God number 1, embrace the cross, and exude hospitality and live for God. While this lifestyle may necessitate change on our part, there lies the hope of a great reward, a reward that is beyond words and transcends this world.