

13 OT Year A readings and Commentary:

Celebration Summary: Bryan M. Cones

The opening prayers and second reading of today's liturgy sound a clear baptismal note as we continue our journey through Ordinary Time. In Romans Paul contrasts our new life in Christ through baptism to our former death in sin. The opening prayers contrast the "darkness of hatred and sin" with the "light of Jesus" (alternative opening prayer). We who have been baptized now "walk in the light of Christ," sheltered by the "radiance" of God's truth (opening prayer).

That baptism commits us to service in the world, and our Sunday Eucharist strengthens us for that mission. We acknowledge the power of the Eucharist to help us serve God faithfully (prayer over the gifts), and so we ask that our celebration and communion may bring us a share of divine life and help us bring God's love to the world (prayer after communion).

The interplay between the first reading and gospel put flesh on that baptismal call to service. The woman of Shunem recognizes Elisha as a prophet and holy man, and so welcomes him into her home. Her reward, the gift of a son, is a foretaste of what those who aid Jesus' disciples will receive in the reign of God.

Since our baptismal call to service stands at the heart of today's liturgy, let the preaching, prayers, and song point the assembly to the needs of the world, for even the gift of a "cup of cold water" (gospel) can bring God's reign nearer.

First Reading 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

Elisha is a holy man of God, let him remain.

A reading from the second Book of Kings

One day Elisha came to Shunem,
where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her.
Afterward, whenever he passed by, he used to stop there to dine.
So she said to her husband, "I know that Elisha is a holy man of God.
Since he visits us often, let us arrange a little room on the roof
and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp,
so that when he comes to us he can stay there."
Sometime later Elisha arrived and stayed in the room overnight.

Later Elisha asked, "Can something be done for her?"
His servant Gehazi answered, "Yes!
She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years."
Elisha said, "Call her."
When the woman had been called and stood at the door,

Elisha promised, "This time next year
you will be fondling a baby son."

The word of the Lord

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings

This story in today's Liturgy of the Word about the prophet Elisha may seem strange at first hearing. Almost inevitably our Western style of hearing or reading will want to know if the miraculous child promised to the rich woman of Shunem is historical, or does it belong to a typical folk tale in which the birth of a child to an elderly parent is a reward for hospitality, perhaps patterned after Abraham and Sara in Genesis 18. Getting caught up in that way of reading would be a shame. The real point of the story in 2 Kings is best read in the light of the Lord's words in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "He who welcomes you, welcomes me, and he who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me." Welcoming the Lord's messenger is welcoming the Lord himself, and who may that messenger not be? One of the charisms of the Order of St. Benedict is hospitality. The "other" is recognized as Christ and so must be welcomed. Suppose we read our story from 2 Kings in a Benedictine fashion! The unnamed lady, who reaches out to Elisha with such lavish hospitality, building an extension to her house for the prophet, is welcoming the one who sends the prophet, the Lord God. Throughout the world folk wisdom, as well as today's reading, tells us that generosity in hospitality is always rewarded. © 2005, OCP. All rights reserved.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19

℟ (2a) For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever,
through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness.
For you have said, "My kindness is established forever";
in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

℟ For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed the people who know the joyful shout;
in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk.
At your name they rejoice all the day,
and through your justice they are exalted.

℟ For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

You are the splendor of their strength,
and by your favor our horn is exalted.
For to the LORD belongs our shield,
and the Holy One of Israel, our king.

✠ For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19 commentary by John Paul Heil

Main Theme: We praise God for the many blessings bestowed upon us. In our first reading from the second book of Kings a Shunemite woman graciously extends her hospitality to the prophet Elisha by providing a place for him to stay in her home. She is rewarded for thus assisting Elisha in his prophetic mission, as the prophet promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son." This exemplifies what Jesus promises in today's gospel reading: "Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward." We will likewise be rewarded and blessed by God for assisting those engaged in the prophetic and missionary activities of the Church.

Today's responsorial from Psalm 89 invites us to praise God for the blessings he bestows on those who assist the prophets and missionaries of today. We praise the God who promises that his kindness towards us "is established forever." Those blessed by God "rejoice all the day" because through God's justice they are exalted. We praise and entrust ourselves to the God who protects and strengthens us: "by your favor our horn (that is, our power or strength) is exalted. We entrust all of those charged with our protection ("our shield" and "our king") to the Holy One of Israel. © 2005, OCP. All rights reserved.

Second Reading Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Buried with Christ in baptism, we shall walk in the newness of life.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:
Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?
We were indeed 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 newness of life.

If, then, we have died with Christ,

we believe that we shall also live with him.
We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more;
death no longer has power over him.
As to his death, he died to sin once and for all;
as to his life, he lives for God.
Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin
and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11 commentary by Tom Conry

It would be hard to find a book that has affected the self-understanding of the church more than Paul's letter to the Romans. Written near the end of Paul's career, it is the product of a mature mind and takes up a number of themes that were left unfinished in earlier letters.

This particular reading is marked by a quotation from an early Christian baptismal creed ("Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more"). The crux of Paul's argument is that death frees one from the obligations of slavery; even Christ, having died once, will never die again. In the same way, Paul argues, everyone who is baptized "into Christ" – an expression whose closest parallel is the deposit of money into a bank account – has likewise participated in Christ's death and so is freed of the obligations of slavery to any kind of evil.

Once again this text makes clear that the primary symbolism of Baptism is not washing, but drowning. It is the participation in the new Exodus, the liberation from bondage and participation in the new covenant, the new land, the reign of heaven. ©2003, OCP. All rights reserved.

Gospel Acclamation 1 Peter 2:9

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation;
announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 10:37-42

Whoever does not take up his cross is not worthy of me. Whoever receives you, receives me.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his apostles:

"Whoever 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;
and whoever does not take up his cross
and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it,
and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

"Whoever receives you receives me,
and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet
will receive a prophet's reward,
and whoever receives a righteous man
because he is a righteous man
will receive a righteous man's reward.

And whoever gives only a cup of cold 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."

The Gospel of the Lord

Matthew 10:37-42 commentary by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB

The reality of early Christian discipleship always had the potential of being harsh. Hard choices had to be made and these choices could effect one's relationship with one's family. Keep in mind that family membership, identity, support, and care were held in highest honor by the culture of Jesus. Family was everything. The teaching of Jesus does not say that one should value and love family less, but it does say that one must value and love Jesus more (Mt 10:37). If ever one had to choose between family or Jesus the choice always had to be Jesus. This is a true test of discipleship and some would find it impossible.

Disciples must know that the way of discipleship is not a way of glory, power, and wealth. It is, at its core, the way of the cross (Mt 10:38). Without the cross there is no resurrection. Without death there is no new life. For a disciple what really constitutes life will appear like death to others, and what others see as death will be life for a disciple (Mt 10:39). Discipleship is fundamentally a counter-cultural way to live. The disciple represents Jesus on earth. Therefore whoever receives a disciple in effect actually receives Jesus. In turn, whoever receives Jesus will actually be receiving God (Mt 10:40). Often this all takes place anonymously.

Christian prophets who were often itinerant missionaries deserve to be received as those who speak in the name of God (Mt 10:41). This was not always easy to determine

and was sometimes a judgment of faith. Still whoever is willing to risk and to reach out to meet even the most basic needs of a disciple will receive a just reward (Mt 10:42).

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