

13th Sunday of the Year

Year B – Series 2

The Lord Who Gives Life.

The Lord made us to live. Death is totally opposed to God, who is life itself. And yet Christ accepted death in order that we might live. He took our poverty to make us rich.

(Wisdom 1: 13-15, 2: 23-24; 2 Cor. 8: 7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5: 21-24, 35-43)

All of us, as we grow older, become increasingly conscious of time. More and more, we live our days and our weeks with one eye on the clock and the other on the calendar. There are certain things we must do, and there are some things that we would like to do. Either way, we are conscious that we only have a limited time in which to do them all. So often, we carefully plan our days, only to find that there are times when our plans are disrupted and have to be changed.

Today's Gospel reading tells the story of just such a day in the life of our Lord. It was a day which began, like many others, with Jesus on the seaside, surrounded by a great crowd of people, where he had an ideal opportunity for teaching. That may have been his intention on that day, but other things intruded, and his plans had to be changed. – Life is like that. – We plan one thing, and all too often, end up doing something completely different.

Some of the plans we have to change are not all that important, merely meaning minor adjustments to our daily routine. For example, we plan to go out to get some shopping, and an unexpected visitor calls round or telephones, just as we are about to set off. Or we plan to wash the car or mow the lawn, only for it to rain just as we are about to begin.

On the other hand, some plans are rather more significant, such as those 'long-term' or 'lifestyle' plans we make for our futures. For example, we train to be an artist, and later find that we have developed arthritis in our fingers, and so we can no longer hold the paint brush. Or we train to be secretaries, or accountants, or IT workers, or skilled in a particular field, only to find later on in life that God wants us to be doctors or nurses, or teachers, even parish priests. Our whole career has to take a new, and unexpected direction.

Being prepared for changing our plans can be one of life's most difficult and trying tests. In today's gospel Jesus shows us how to cope when we are forced with such changes. He teaches us to be flexible.

Consider, if you will, he must have had some kind of plan for that day in his life. If you think about it, and knowing the man Jesus was, it is quite unthinkable that he would just amble aimlessly into any day, with nothing particular in mind. Children may do that. Teenagers very often do exactly that. I even know some overly laid-back adults who do that. But not Jesus.

Like us, he also had very clear and particular plans for his life. But unlike many of us, they were not chiselled in granite. When the occasion called for it, he adapted to the needs before him and changed his plans. He did what was required or asked of him.

And so, our gospel story teaches us that sometimes our plans just have to be changed, especially when it concerns people in need.

When our plans for the day do not allow time to help a hurting person, then those plans simply have to be set aside. And that is precisely what Jesus did. The sick child in our story needed him, so he set everything else aside and went straight to her. – This was so very typical of him. He would leave ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold and go out in search of the one that was lost. – Nothing was more important in his life than helping someone in need.

If we would be Jesus' disciples, then that same care, that same concern, that same love, must have a prominent role in our lives. If there is one absolute truth in this world, it is that there are a very great many suffering, needful people in it.

I often hear it said, 'Well, yes, we could all work nonstop, trying to help others, so much so, that we would get nothing else done. But when all is said and done, someone has to teach. Someone has to deliver the post. Someone has to sweep the floors and wash the dishes. Someone has to earn a living and support the family. We cannot simply drop everything else and spend all our days helping the needy. It is simply a matter of priorities.'

It is a given that we are all busy people. But (and here is the rub) do we ever stop to ask ourselves what are we busy with? When was the last time you checked your priorities? A mother or father should ask, and often, 'Am I spending too much time at work, time that could be better spent with my children?' To spend an hour on the floor playing a childish game with your children could accomplish far more than you might imagine.

As a priest, I have been privileged to be with a good number of people in the last days and hours of their lives. Some were able to make their confession; most expressed regrets of one kind or another. But not once – and I'm sure most priest, if not all, would say the same – have I ever had someone say that they regretted not spending more time at work or in the office.

Changing our plans in accordance with the 'right priorities' may turn out to be the most important thing we ever do.

In a very busy life, Jesus changed his plans to help a dying child and a chronically sick woman. I am absolutely sure that if he had to live that day again, he would have done exactly the same. By being prepared to change his plans Jesus achieved so much good.

As Christians, are we not called to, likewise, do good?

Whenever we find we have to change our plans, let us not look at it as an interruption, or something of a nuisance; something to be endured. Rather, let us recognise it as our opportunity for doing good. Let us see it as a God-given chance to live our Lord's example.