



July 2, 2023

13th Sunday of Ordinary Time

If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

Romans 6:8



Dear Friends,

Barbara Holmes writes, *"There's no such thing as 'drive-by loving.'"* I love that. She goes on to say, *"In order to love, you have to slow down... You have to give attention to the object, to the person, of your love. There has to be reciprocity and mutuality. It is giving ourselves over, letting go..."* Jesus does not want our drive-by loving. He demands our whole focus and attention. And that means, using the metaphor of Jesus, a letting go that is type of crucifixion.

In the first century culture of Mediterranean Jews, the family (kinship) is the central social institution, just as market economics is to our world. Jesus' requirement that his followers should love him more than they love mother, father, son, or daughter was shocking to his listeners.

Ancient Middle Eastern families were very large and extended. The father and all his children including married sons their wives and children lived in one place. The ideal marriage partner was a cousin which bonded the families tightly. The mentality was, "Our family against everyone else."

In this environment to marry outside the family was unthinkable. And to sever all ties with family like the "prodigal son" was stupid and suicidal. Outside the family no one could be trusted, no one would help you, and worst of all in this society you lack honor. The consequences were dire. You lose all economic, religious, educational, social connections, and importantly you lost your connection to the land. It is these consequences that Jesus and Paul have in mind when Jesus invites us to take up the cross, and Paul invites us to the death of baptism.

What are we offered in return? Jesus is building a new kind of family that is not based on blood, tribe, or nation. He is forming a family kinship linked by bonds of affection for him. In order to sustain this new family, he draws upon another ancient institution, hospitality. Hospitality was what society was obligated to offer strangers. Hospitality provides safe passage for families and small groups in regions where they have no family.

Think of Abraham and Lot. They needed the hospitality of the people of Sodom and Gomorra. According to the prophet Isaiah, instead of hospitality Abraham and Lot received hostility. The citizens of these cities are condemned for violating the law of hospitality.

In their history as a nomadic people, wandering the desert, Israel followed the law of hospitality. Not to offer food and water to strangers traveling the harsh environment would be the same as killing them. Hospitality is what the woman of Shunem offers the prophet Elisha (in our first reading). She and her husband who had been childless would receive from the prophet the blessing of a child.

Being hospitable gave a person and family honor. Jesus will link the hospitality practiced among his non-related followers to a reward God will give. Jesus is building a new kind of world built not on blood and tribal relations but on the willingness to do the will of God. The will of God revealed by Jesus is to enact God's compassionate love for all. That demands a radical commitment. We must be involved in the lives of others.

That takes time. There is "no drive-by loving." Our communities need to be places of hospitality and welcome to all. God's love knows no limits, and neither should ours. Our baptism is a commitment to die to self and rise as a member of the body of Christ extending his hospitality to all, especially the marginalized. Hospitality demands that our nation made up of immigrants look for ways to care for the millions of refugees that are seeking our aid. Our baptismal vocation is to get involved in the lives of others. We love others because they are Christ!

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church