

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OT -A

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

We might feel a certain disconnect from these words of Jesus, especially since last Sunday we honored our fathers and prayed for them in a particular way.

However, at the beginning of this same chapter in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that parents would hand over their children and siblings would betray siblings in the persecutions to come.

And history has born witness to this.

Even in our own time, families can be torn apart because a member is newly embracing Christianity, or is becoming a more faithful believer.

Jesus is challenging us to recognize the primacy of the relationship we are called to have with him.

From that relationship flows the possibility of a profoundly deeper relationship we can have through Jesus with one another.

Beyond our birth family, Jesus invites us to love our fellow disciples, as well as the "little ones" of society, recognizing the new family into which we have been reborn.

In today's second reading St. Paul powerfully reminds us: "Are you unaware that we who baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?"

Through Baptism we are called to die to our egocentric self and rise to "live in newness of life."

This is what Jesus meant when he said in today's Gospel: "If you lose your life for my sake you will find it."

In order to receive something that is new, we often must first let go of an old habit or understanding we thought we couldn't live without.

And this is not a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Jesus tells us that we must take up our cross each day and follow in his footsteps.

What is a habit or mind-set that I need to give up in order to follow Jesus more closely?

Perhaps it is those patches of self-centeredness that keep me from reaching out to others.

Is it possible that I have become complacent regarding prejudice and injustice?

Or maybe I am holding on to an old resentment or hurt that continues to fuel a simmering anger?

Earlier in the Gospel according to Matthew we read from the Sermon on the Mount: "Do to others what you would have them do to you. This is the Law and the Prophets."

Kindness and generosity are at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

Hospitality has always been an important biblical virtue as our first reading attests to.

When Jesus says: "Whoever receives you receives me," we should hear that in light of Jesus' description of the Last Judgement in terms of "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters you do for me."

Whenever we welcome another person, when we offer hospitality, when we give something to quench another person's thirst or hunger - whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual - we receive Jesus.

And when we receive Jesus we receive the One who sent Jesus.

In other words, we are caught up into the Father's embrace, into the intimacy of that Divine dance of love we call the Trinity.

That is our "reward."

That is the greater, wider, deeper life we will find when we lose our life and let go of our tight grip on our own small, self-centered world.

"If we have died with Christ we believe that we live with Christ."

And since death has no power over him, death will no longer have power over us.