

Rev. Toan Do
Second Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a
Romans 6:3-4, 8-11
Matthew 10:37-42

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH
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Tommy and Nicole, I just wanted to make a statement. I was thinking about the first reading today from the Second Book of Kings, which we all just heard. It almost brings your family back to that reading of this woman and the man, who was advanced in age and did not have children. Elijah came and visited them a year later; they had a child.

This is a gift from God for you and your family. Look at the bright face of Van Andrew. I could not be happier because he's more anxious to be baptized than I am about baptizing him. (Laughing) But I wanted to speak more, and beyond that wonderful, encouraging, loving message from our first reading today, to something that is more challenging, as Jesus tells His disciples today. We just heard that whoever loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. To you, Nicole and Tom, whoever loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Listening to this passage right in the context of our baptism of a child today, and to all of us, we all have parents, we all have moms and dads. We all have sons and daughters, and we all have families, loved ones.

How could Jesus say such things? In order to understand what Jesus was saying to us, I invite all of us to put ourselves in the context of the first century. Let's say we divide the 100 years of the first century into three different periods. Now we move beyond the first reading from Second Kings, which was 700 or 800 years back to the time of Jesus in the first third of the first century. In the gospel today, Matthew, as we know, was writing this passage about Jesus and about what Jesus was saying to His disciples in the first third of the first century. The gospel, however, many believe, including myself, was written within the last third of the first century. I would like to invite all of us to think of the second third of the first century in which Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians. Paul was writing to a group of Christians whom he had never met, but he knew that they were growing in numbers in Rome.

That is why the letter addresses the Christians in Rome whom he had not yet met, but still knowing that they were Christians, they were followers of Jesus, more so,

they were those who believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead. So, the context of the two scripture readings today from Paul's letter to the Romans and from the gospel of Matthew puts us rightly in three different phases of the first century. If we take that as a cue to our attempt to understand the gospel, as challenging as it is, to give up or not to love parents, mother, and father, sons and daughters, but to love Jesus more. Of course, when Jesus spoke to those people in the first third of the first century, He was trying to say that in this world, those who love material things, those who love flesh, those who love the life of this world will never be able, or let's just put it simply, will not be able to be admitted to the kingdom of heaven.

When this same gospel passage was written and read in the last third of the first century, it was a time in which Christians were already growing in numbers across the Roman Empire, and Christians were being persecuted by the Roman emperors. When Matthew wrote this gospel, many believe it was written in today's modern times in Syria or Lebanon. They, too, were going through suffering persecution from the people in the Roman Empire. For that reason, this same passage, supposedly written for the first people in Jesus' own time, echoes and reverberates the same to those in the last third of the first century. Why? Because He says here, whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Taking up the cross implies suffering from this world in many different forms, and the gift that we have to ask ourselves. Can we give up at the end of our journey, at the end of the journeys of those Christians at the end of the first century, can they give up their lives in this world for the life eternal with God?

That's why the second reading today from Paul's letter to the Roman Christians makes more sense to us, namely, why Paul says, brothers and sisters, namely Roman Christians, the Christians in Rome, and us today, brothers and sisters, are you unaware that we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Now, think about that for the moment. By the time Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians, as I mentioned earlier, Paul had not met these Christians in Rome. He presumed they had been baptized by water. In a moment, we will baptize Van Andrew in water. So, for Paul, only baptism through water is not enough. One has to go beyond the water in this life to step into the mystery of God, namely, to die with Christ. Our own self, our material being has to be left behind, and give way to the mystery and life with God, namely with Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, and whom God raised from the dead.

Paul is talking to or trying to explain to the Roman Christians that baptism, which they have received through water, now has to go beyond that into the realms of God's mystery, namely, let our own selves die and let it be left behind. Embrace the new self, the new person in Jesus Christ. This is where the challenge comes in. In a

few moments, in the name of the church and in the name of God our Father, God our Son, Jesus Christ, and God our Holy Spirit, I will baptize Van Andrew in water. But it is the challenge for Nicole and Thomas, and the Godparents to raise this child into the faith of Jesus Christ beyond the water, that he will be cleansed into life's fullness with God and with Jesus. That life speaks to them more than the water that he will be baptized with.

It is also for all of us to go beyond the time and the moments when we were baptized in water, to live a life of Christ, to live a life of God, to follow God with our whole heart. That is the challenge that these two scripture readings from Paul's letter to the Roman Christians and Matthew's gospel speaking on behalf of Jesus, want us to arrive at our faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead. No more, no longer material, no longer life, no longer flesh, but Spirit so that we live eternally with God.