

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go up to Jerusalem. And He sent messengers ahead of Him. On their way, they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for Him; but they did not receive Him, because His face was set toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to Him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head.” To another He said, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow You, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Questions

1) **The Context:** The context for this gospel passage is really Jesus' entire journey to Jerusalem, which begins with Luke 9:51 and continues through Luke 19:44. The reader is aware that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is not just a journey to the holy city but is a journey to His death. This selection from Luke introduces two themes: 1) the increasing division between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, and 2) Jesus' preparation of His disciples for His death and His instructions to them that they must be faithful despite what the world will throw their way. Verse 51a tells us "When the days drew near for Him to be taken up" (Greek: 'analempseos'- which can be a reference to a physical journey to Jerusalem (uphill to Mount Zion) or to being lifted up on the cross). Because of other parallels with Elijah, we can also take this as a reference to Jesus' ascension.

2) "...He set His face to go to Jerusalem." (v. 51b). The phrase 'set his face' also appears in more than a few Old Testament texts which describe the prophets (Isaiah 50:7, 'therefore I have set my face like flint and I know that I shall not be put to shame.' Jer. 21:10; Ezek. 6:2; 13:17; 21:2). To 'set one's face' towards something (a place, a journey, a mission) is a way of describing one's unwavering resolve to complete the task. This kind of unwavering dedication and resolve can be seen in Jesus' determination to carry out what He was sent to the earth to do, to save all of humanity through His life, death and resurrection. Jesus' Love for us made Him determined to complete that task no matter how scary, how lonely, how humiliating or how painful. When has God placed that kind of love in us? When have we experienced such a love for God and for His call on our lives that we have set our face like 'flint' in order to carry out what He has asked of us?

3) Jesus sent His disciples on ahead of Him as messengers (emissaries); not an uncommon practice during that time for traveling dignitaries. God sent John as a messenger to herald Jesus' first coming. Now God sends us as messengers to herald Jesus' second coming. In what way(s) do we see ourselves as heralds of Jesus' second coming?

4) The Samaritans did not receive him because His face was set toward Jerusalem. This is the only negative reference to Samaritans in all of Luke's gospel. The gospel writers (particularly Luke) more often than not describe the Samaritans very favorably (e.g. the Good Samaritan Lk. 10:25-37, The Samaritan leper (17:16), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). But in this

case, the Samaritans reject Jesus *because* He has His face set toward Jerusalem. Only an observant Jew would his face towards Jerusalem because he has Godly business to attend to at that place. Samaritans for years had been on the receiving end of racism and rejection from observant Jews traveling through Samaria. Therefore, it would not be unusual for Samaritans to have animosity towards a pious practicing Jew. When have we rejected someone out of ignorance or fear and later discovered what we missed?

5) The disciples, James and John are first hand witnesses to the Samaritan's rejection of Jesus. His disciples take this rejection to heart and as a demonstration of solidarity with Him, they offer to call down fire from heaven to rebuke the Samaritans (reference to 1 Kings 1, 22:51). Instead, the disciples receive the rebuke from Jesus. The word 'rebuke' is a very strong term which is used in other parts of the gospel to describe how Jesus rebukes demons (Lk. 4:35, 41, 9:42), fevers (4:39) and storms (8:24). Jesus rebukes all of these things that are associated with the realm of evil but never has He rebuked His disciples in this way. The use of this strong term correlates to the strength of the point that Jesus desires to make with His disciples. Jesus does not teach retaliation, but justice, fairness and kindness towards enemies. The response to those who reject them, is to wipe the feet as a testimony against them and move on. This is what they do. When have we been called to do the same? When have you been called to remain and be a witness in the midst opposing forces?

6) They eagerly tell Jesus that they will follow Him wherever He goes. Jesus quickly reminds them that 'foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head.' Jesus makes His disciples aware that He is not on the fast track to 'worldly success' lest anyone have the wrong idea, but instead He is on the fast track to death and subsequent resurrection. When has Jesus asked you to follow Him on the fast track to 'death' so that He can show His victory over death through you? What was your response?

7) "Let the dead bury their own dead" (60a) is Jesus' response to the man who requests time off to bury his father. (vs. 59) Jesus' response seems a bit harsh but if we take the request within its cultural context, we have different understanding. The request to 'bury one's father' comes from a cultural tradition in the Middle East referring to the son's duty to go, be with and serve his father until his father dies and then give him a respectful burial. The period of time requested could be anywhere from 15 years to 5 months. It is not that Jesus does not care about honoring father and mother because He would have been fully aware of that as one of the ten great commandments. Jesus has

another thing in mind (some scholars say), ‘let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead.’ The *spiritually dead* are welcome to attend to that task because the mission of the Kingdom will not be furthered by them. Therefore, the spiritually dead are welcome to spend their time and energy how they see fit because they would not spend it on Kingdom purposes anyway. What could the phrase “let the dead bury their own dead” mean to us 21st century people?

8) “But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (v. 60b) Jesus has some very special tasks for those who are spiritually alive; those who know the value of and purpose for attending to the mission of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is addressing a separate group here, ‘as for YOU’ (you all who are spiritually alive and who are aware of and care about the mission of God). For those people Jesus has a separate task, to ‘go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ This phrase is reminiscent of Jesus speaking to His disciples in Mark Chp. 1:38 as He urges them to move forward to the next town to proclaim the Kingdom. He says; “Let us go on to the next towns that I may proclaim there also; for that is why I came.” Jesus here reminds the disciples of their core mission to share and spread the reality of the kingdom of God. In what ways do we sometimes need to be reminded of our core mission as Catholic Christians and as a Church?

9) “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.” (vs. 62). Again, this sounds harsh, but Jesus is making a very clear analogy so that His point would not be missed. A person who sets the hand to the plow would need one hand on the plow another hand on the animal pulling the plow and two eyes on a distant point in order to plow in a straight line. In order to sow seed for an abundant harvest efficiently and effectively one would have to have as many parallel straight rows as possible. The one who looked back would create a crooked row that would waste space and could not be imitated (see James 1:6-8). A modern analogy might be driving while eating, turning around to talk to the people in the back seat and talking on ones’ cell phone at the same time. Why would Jesus have a concern about the one who sets his/her hand to the plow and keeps looking back? In what way could that make a person less effective for kingdom purposes?

10) Many characters throughout the Scripture made excuses as to why they could not follow God’s plan for them; (e.g. Moses: Ex. 3:11, 4:10, Gideon: Judges 6:15, Jeremiah: Jer. 1:6, Isaiah: Is. 6:5). Even though these people made excuses God still pursued them and made it possible for them to follow their call. How has this been true in your own life?