

Timothy J. Grassi

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

A young girl told the story about needing to have her teeth repaired when she was in college. Being a college student, she could hardly afford to have one tooth filled, but the pain was so bad she had to see a dentist. When she went, he wanted to fix all her teeth and she said I can't afford it and started to leave. He understood and said, "well, when you finish college you'll get a job and make some money and you can pay me then. "He did the job on credit, and it made a wonderful difference in the way she felt. She was able to pay him off after graduation. She called him a "woodwork angel." She described "woodwork angel" as a stranger who comes out of nowhere, out of the woodwork, when a person needs help. They may help out with money, skills, protection from danger or from making a big mistake, they may offer us hospitality as the woman did for the prophet Elisha in the first reading, or they may simply offer us a cup of cold water. We all need them and we all need TO BE one to others. The Gospel we just heard is really not one of those "feel good" messages. Jesus says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." This is not an easy message to

swallow in one gulp. It certainly doesn't seem to be one of those peace, love and joy messages where we all walk off happy forever after. Being willing to give up everything for Christ, even our own lives, is a hard message. The reality is that there is no such thing as cheap grace. "Cheap Grace" means hoping to gain eternal happiness while asking ourselves, "What is the least I can do to get by with." But, the reality is that when Christ calls a person, He is inviting that person to come and die. The point is, following Christ can cost us dearly. If we're afraid of that, if we're always looking for a Church that doesn't really challenge us, then we are not wanting to hear Christ. The question we need to ask ourselves is are we putting anyone or anything above Christ in our life? Our relationship with Jesus needs to be in a class by itself. We are called to love Jesus much more than we love anyone else. We must love Jesus so much that we lose our worldly lives, give our lives to Him, suffer in love for Him, and take up our crosses daily in imitation of Him, and even die for Him. In our second reading we heard St. Paul say, "If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." When we were Baptized we all were given the Baptismal grace to die to ourselves so that we might live with Christ through all eternity. The problem is that we are not good at dying to ourselves. We like having all the gadgets and all the comforts and we don't like to be bothered by the needs of others. But, what will please us the most is to be a "woodwork angel;" to be willing to reach out to others in need and come

out of nowhere to help. We must not fear the crosses of our lives. God is our Father and He always matches it to our strength. From the cross comes the Divine Blood which regenerates us and is the fount of all the joys reserved for us. It is the misfortunes and crosses that bring us ever closer to God. We all need to be chiselling away at our selfish and self-indulgent lives to make ourselves “woodwork angels.” What do you need to let go of so that Christ is the number one priority in your life? Are you putting anything above Him in your daily life, be honest. Remember what Jesus said in the Gospel, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” If we want to find our life, then we need to lose the things we are most strangely holding onto that are NOT Christ!