

Our Sunday Readings



Aligned with God

2 KINGS 4:8-11,14-16a

Reading closely

1. What might the woman know about Elisha?
2. Why do you think the woman invited Elisha to stay with her and her husband?
3. How do you think Elisha felt about the invitation?
4. How generous is the woman's hospitality?
5. What might Elisha and the woman and her husband have talked about?
6. Does the woman ask anything of Elisha?
7. Why do you think Elisha wanted to do something for the woman?
8. How might the woman have felt about not having children?
9. Do you think the woman expected such a gift from Elisha?
10. How might the woman have felt about Elisha's promise?

Living the word

11. Why do you think hospitality was an important cultural value in ancient Israel?
12. What does hospitality look like today?
13. How hospitable are you?
14. How hospitably have you been treated?

THE FIRST READING

Above and beyond

The prophet Elisha, successor to Elijah, began his prophetic ministry during the mid ninth century BC. Like Elijah, the miracles Elisha did reveal that he acted on behalf of Israel's God, the LORD.

In this passage a woman shows the hospitality customary at that time, but then she goes above and beyond these expectations by offering Elisha a private room he could use during his travels.

A gift of honor and life

Women of this era ensured the continuity of their family and tribe by bearing and raising children. Children carried on the family name, and adult children took care of elderly parents. Children were looked upon as a divine blessing.

By assuring the woman that she will finally have a child, Elisha extends to her a blessing of life from the LORD, the God in whose name he acts. The story recalls the visit of the three strangers to Abraham and Sarah. One of the strangers assures that elderly couple that they will have a son (Gen 18:1-10).

MATTHEW 10:37-42**Reading closely**

1. How might love for a parent or child get in the way of a person's love for Jesus?
2. What are some ways a parent or child should put Jesus before family?
3. What are all the things that could frighten a person away from Jesus?
4. What might Jesus mean by *worthy of me*?
5. What are all the ways people try to *find their lives*?
6. What are all the ways a person can offer hospitality to a disciple of Jesus?
7. What might be a person's reward for their gesture(s) of hospitality?

Living the word

8. How costly has discipleship been for you?
9. How receptive have you been to the gospel?
10. How readily have people listened to you when you have shared the gospel?
11. When you share your faith, do you do so in a gracious, hospitable way?

THE GOSPEL READING**Bringing division**

In verse 34 Jesus declares that he has come to bring division, even within families. Jesus taught and lived a non-violent way of life, but his way to peace angered and repelled people. Those who decide to follow his way will probably clash with those who don't, including friends and family, who might ultimately reject them, too.

Before all else

True followers put Jesus before everyone and everything else: family, reputation and honor, comfort, even physical life. When he spoke of the cross Jesus referred to crucifixion, the Roman Empire's way of exerting control over the people it had conquered. Crucifixion was both a painful and a shameful way to die. By using this image, Jesus makes it clear that discipleship is a difficult, even a dangerous, choice. Those who follow him will face radical changes to their lives.

The life paradox

Our instinct is to protect our earthly existence. Following Jesus puts our lives – and the way we live – at risk. Jesus insists that by letting go of our own interests, even our earthly life itself, we will gain a new life, an eternal one.

If we cling to our earthly existence, we will lose both our earthly life and our eternal one when we die. What looks like a contradiction (losing our lives for the sake of discipleship) turns out to be the only way to gain eternal life.

Don't kill the messenger

In verses 40-42 the focus shifts from potential disciples to those who respond to Jesus' disciples. Just as today people represent or stand in for their employer, so it was in biblical times. A prophet (like Elijah) represented God. A positive response to the prophet equaled a positive response to God.

Those who offer even the smallest kindness to a disciple of Jesus offer that kindness to Jesus himself. A dramatic example of such hospitality and its rewards is Matthew 25:31-46 in which the metaphorical sheep are separated from the goats.

PRAYER

adapted from the "Blessing before Leaving on a Journey" in Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers

All-powerful and ever-living God,
when your Son Jesus sent his disciples
to further your kingdom,
you kept them safe through their journeys.
Protect us, your servants,
who also strive to follow your Son.
Walk by our side to help us.
Be our companion and our strength on the way.
Be our refuge in every adversity.
Lead us, O Lord,
as we share your kingdom with others,
and bring us at last to the eternal haven of
salvation.
Amen.