



# SACRED HEART CHURCH OF THE FIRST PEOPLES

10821-96 Street, Edmonton, AB T5H 2J8  
 P: 780.422.3052 F: 780.423.0176 E: sacredheart.firstpeoples@caedm.ca  
 Facebook: Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples-Catholic Church



## 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIMES —C

### *Responding to God's Call*

(1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21; Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-18; Luke 9:51-62)

This Sunday could be called vocation Sunday as the readings are all about a call from God and a variety of responses, culminating in the ideal response that St. Paul presents in the reading to the Galatians.

The ideal disciple is one who responds to Jesus by keeping his command to love others as we love ourselves.

The two prophets, Elijah and his disciple, Elisha dramatize how radical our response to God's call is meant to be. After a moment's hesitation, Elisha responds by sacrificing his livelihood, letting go of his plans and dreams for his life, leaving it all behind and becoming a servant/disciple of Elijah.

Jesus in the gospel spells out the nature of that call. The totally non-violent God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is asking us to live and teach non-violence - a truth that the world still struggles to grasp. There was a man in Toronto who regularly wrote some of the Canadian bishops, urging them to promote a more radical, broad message of non-violence that goes beyond simply being anti-abortion, to promoting peace and justice and respect for all life, and above all, resistance to armed conflict in all its forms, especially in the Middle East.

Jesus goes on to underline the sacrificial aspect of discipleship. The disciple will have to surrender some of his or her plans to follow the Lord. Jesus also speaks of total commitment. This call is radical in that it demands everything of the disciple - there must be no other greater priority.

There is a story of farmyard animals who loved their master so much that they met one day to see what they could do for him in appreciation. The hen suggested they could give him a breakfast in bed of bacon and eggs. The pig replied that was fine for the hen, but for him it would be total commitment! Our response to God's call would probably line up more with the pig in this story, as Jesus demands total commitment of us also.

A last characteristic of the call to follow him, for Jesus, is the command to proclaim the kingdom of God. This, in a sense, is the most basic element of following Jesus.

That is what he was all about. He came to inaugurate a new way of life, the life of God in heaven, here on earth, right here and now. We are not only to proclaim this reign of God; we are to actively and whole heartedly, with our total being, do everything in our power, by word and action, to help realize that reign of God in our personal lives and in our interactions with all others. That is our *raison-d'être* as well.

St. Paul, in his turn, simply builds on all that Jesus has said and done. As disciples baptized into Jesus Christ, we have been set free from sin and selfishness. We are now free to love, and really love, in an agape kind of way. We are to love others as we love ourselves. We have every reason to have dignity and high self-esteem, for we follow Jesus, the Word made Flesh. We are now to live and act as he did, in total selflessness, giving of ourselves as he did. We are to do this not on our own, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Risen Lord within us. We do this because we are disciples of Christ.

Some years ago, there was a TV series entitled, "Thirty Something." One episode went this way: A group of married men gathered for a social evening at a hotel. One of the men found himself attracted to the hotel manager with whom he had to deal all evening in terms of arranging food, music, and drink. She was attracted to him, too, and the romantic chemistry intensified. Finally, the moment came to part. The man stalled, thanking her again for her help. She, not wanting to lose the moment, asked him, "Would you like to get together again sometime?" The man hesitated, guiltily apologized for not being more forthright earlier, and did what few have the moral courage to do. Not without sweating a little blood, he said: "I am married. I need to go home to my wife."

Ron Rolheiser is a noted Oblate spiritual writer. His father, perhaps the most moral man he's ever known, used to say: "Unless you can sweat blood, you'll never keep a commitment, in marriage, in priesthood, or anywhere. That's what it takes!"

He was right. One of the great lessons of Gethsemane is precisely that. To keep any commitment, we have to sweat blood because, like Jesus in the Garden, there comes a time when we have to enter into a great loneliness, the loneliness of fidelity and of responding to a higher will and a higher *eros*. The lover in Jesus had to let go of some things. The same is true for each of us.

The Eucharist is itself a call to discipleship. We are empowered by God's love in Jesus, through Word and Sacrament, to go out as disciples to love others as he has loved us, and as we love ourselves. In short, we are to go and be the disciples that Jesus is calling us to be.

**Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI**

## SUICIDE AN OUR MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Margaret Atwood once wrote that sometimes a thing needs to be said, and said, said again, until it doesn't need to be said anymore. That's why I write a column annually on suicide, mostly saying the same things over and over again. The hope is that, like a note put into a bottle and floated out to sea, my little message might find someone needing consolation after losing a loved one to suicide.

What's needs to be said, and said again, about suicide? Four things:

First, that it's a disease and perhaps the most misunderstood of all diseases. We tend to think that if a death is self-inflicted, it is voluntary in a way that death through physical illness or accident is not. For most suicides, this isn't true. A person who dies by suicide dies, as does the victim of a terminal illness or fatal accident, not by his or her own choice. When people die from heart attacks, strokes, cancer, AIDS, and accidents, they die against their will. The same is true for suicide, except that in the case of suicide the breakdown is emotional rather than physical – an emotional stroke, an emotional cancer, a breakdown of the emotional immune system, an emotional fatality.

This is not an analogy. There are different kinds of heart attacks, strokes, cancers, breakdowns of the immune system, and fatal accidents. However, they all have the same effect; they all take someone out of this life against his or her own will. No one who dies through suicide actually wants to die. He or she only wants to end a pain that can no longer be endured, akin to someone jumping to his death out of a burning building because his clothes are on fire.

Second, we should not worry unduly about the eternal salvation of a suicide victim, believing (as we used to) that suicide is the ultimate act of despair and something God will not forgive. God is infinitely more understanding than we are and God's hands are infinitely safer and gentler than our own. Imagine a loving mother having just given birth, welcoming her child onto her breast for the first time. That, I believe, is the best image we have to picture how a suicide victim (most often an overly sensitive soul) is received into the next life. God is infinitely understanding, loving, and gentle. We need not worry about the fate of anyone, no matter the cause of death, who exits this world honest, oversensitive, gentle, over-wrought, and emotionally crushed. God has a special love for the broken and the crushed.

Knowing all of this however, doesn't necessarily take away our pain (and anger) at losing someone to suicide; but faith and understanding aren't meant to take our pain away but rather to give us hope, vision, and support as we walk within our pain.

Third, we should not torture ourselves with second-guessing when we lose a loved one to suicide: "What might I have done? Where did I let this person down? If only I had been there? What if ...?"

It can be natural to be haunted with the thought, "if only I'd been there at the right



time.” Rarely would this have made a difference. Indeed, most of the time, we weren’t there for the exact reason that the person who fell victim to this disease did not want us to be there. He or she picked the moment, the spot, and the means precisely so that we wouldn’t be there. Perhaps it’s more accurate to say that suicide is a disease that picks its victim precisely in such a way so as to exclude others and their attentiveness. This is not an excuse for insensitivity, especially towards those suffering from dangerous depression, but it should be a healthy check against false guilt and fruitless second-guessing.

We’re human beings, not God. People die of illness and accidents all the time and sometimes all the love and attentiveness in the world cannot prevent a loved one from dying. Love, for all its power, is sometimes powerless before a terminal illness.

Fourth, when we lose a loved one to suicide, one of our tasks is to work at redeeming that person’s memory, namely, to put that person’s life into a perspective wherein his or her memory is not forever tainted because it is viewed through the prism of suicide.

A proper human and faith response to suicide should not be horror, fear for the victim’s eternal salvation, guilty second-guessing about how we failed this person, and a hushed, guarded tone forever afterwards when we speak of him or her. Suicide is indeed a horrible way to die, but we must understand it (at least in most cases) as a sickness, a disease, an illness, a tragic breakdown within the emotional immune system.

Most of all, we must trust God, God’s goodness, God’s understanding, God’s power to descend into hell, and God’s power to make all things right, even death by suicide.

**Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas**



## I WILL FOLLOW YOU...BUT

*“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*  
Luke 9:62

Discerning our vocation can be a challenging task. When we focus on listening for God’s call in our lives, we have to step out of our “comfort zone” and stop giving excuses – which is not easy... Today’s Gospel story presents to us the tension between the call and the wholehearted answer: “I will follow you, but...”. There are many factors that can hold us back such as fear, uncertainty, uncomfortableness of letting go or simply a lack of a clear vision and direction. Even the saints struggled with this!

In his early twenties, young Eugene de Mazenod experienced a significant internal crisis. We could say he “hit the wall”. It seems like everything that he intended to do in order to bring some peace and stability into his life was falling apart. He deeply missed his father and uncles, who remained in Palermo, while he returned to Aix. At the same time the atmosphere within the Joannis family “suffocated” him. After failing a couple of opportunities for marriage, he had no other prospects at hand. The unsuccessful trip to Paris, where he hoped to obtain a passport, crushed all his dreams about a military career and a splendid life of nobility in Sicily. This time of crisis, disappointment and lack of direction was an opening for a moment of grace from God to fill the emptiness of Eugene’s life.

The experience of Good Friday was a breakthrough when his heart’s deepest desires were fulfilled. Eugene had a personal encounter with God, who is very real. This was the moment when Eugene was called to let go his own ideas of a “comfort zone” and enter into the uncertainty with trust. *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head... Follow me.”* (Luke 9:58-59). Unlike the men from today’s Gospel, Eugene answered the call. He turned from being self-focused into God-focused, and his life became an oblation to God and His calling. This refocusing of Eugene’s life is confirmed by the conscious decision he made and that was followed by a strong commitment to make God a priority from that day forward. *“What more glorious occupation than to act in everything and for everything only for God, to love him above all else, to love him all the more as one who has loved him too late.”* (Retreat Notes, December 1814)

Our vocation can only be fulfilled if we have the courage to answer the call. Maybe today you hear a call from God to a particular way of life, to make a change, to do something more. Maybe today Jesus says to you, “Follow me.” Have the courage to answer the call!



**By Jarek Pachocki OMI**

## WELCOMING THE STRANGER

In the Old Testament, we find a strong religious challenge to always welcome the stranger, the foreigner.

This was emphasized for two reasons: First, because the Jewish people themselves had once been foreigners and immigrants. Their scriptures kept reminding them not to forget that. Second, they believed that God's revelation, most often, comes to us through the stranger, in what's foreign to us.

The great prophets taught that God favors the poor and coined this mantra (still worth memorizing): *The quality of your faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land; and the quality of justice in the land will always be judged by how orphans, widows, and strangers fare while you are alive.*

Orphans, widows, and strangers! That's scriptural code for who, at any given time, are the three most vulnerable groups in society.

That message was a religious affront to many of the pious at the time who strongly believed that we will be judged religiously and morally by the rigor and strictness of our religious observance. Then, like now, social justice was often religiously marginalized.

Jesus not only makes a preferential option for the poor, but God is in the poor. How we treat the poor is how we treat God.

In Jesus' discourse on the final judgment in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that we will be judged based on how we treated the most vulnerable among us. He singles out "the stranger", the foreigner, the refugee: "I was a stranger and you made me welcome ... or ... you never made me welcome.

These scriptural principles are very apropos today in the face of the refugee and immigrant issues we are facing. As Christians we may not turn our backs on them or turn them away. If Jesus is to be believed, we will be judged religiously more by how we treat refugees than by whether we are going to church.

The issue of refugees and immigrants is both highly sensitive and very complex. For all sorts of pragmatic reasons, political, social, economic, and security, we can perhaps justify not welcoming the stranger; but we can never justify this on Christian grounds.

Not welcoming stranger is antithetical to the very heart of Jesus' message.

**Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas**

## **READINGS FOR THE 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIMES**

### **FIRST READING**

#### **A reading from the First Book of Kings (1 Kings 16.16b, 19-21)**

The Lord spoke to the Prophet Elijah and said, “You shall anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, as Prophet in your place.”

So Elijah set out from there, and found Elisha, who was ploughing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth.

Elijah passed by Elisha and threw his mantle over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Go back again; for what have I done to you?” Elisha returned from following Elijah, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then Elisha set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 16)**

**Response: You are my chosen portion, O Lord.**

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. R.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. R.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. R.

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. R.

### **SECOND READING**

#### **A reading from Paul’s letter to the Galatians (Galatians 5.1, 13-18)**

Brothers and sisters: For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh

desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

**Thanks be to God**

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**Alleluia. Alleluia.**

Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening; you have the words of eternal life..

**Alleluia.**

### **GOSPEL READING**

**A reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 9.51-62)**

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for Jesus; but the Samaritans 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 Jesus 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 Jesus said, "Follow me." But he replied, "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 plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

**The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

## Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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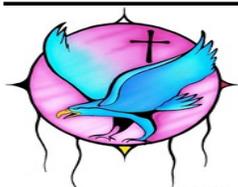
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