Spirituality
Scripture for Life



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by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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June 27, 2020
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My dad was a doctor. That meant that there were a whole lot of people we kids didn't know whose claim on his time could trump what we wanted to do. Dad didn't think of his work as a career or a profession, but a vocation: the work to which God called him and for which God had given him the necessary gifts. Mom supported him so much that, long before celibacy was a topic of serious debate in the church, she used to say, "If a devoted physician can be married, so could a priest." She, more than anybody, understood the price of his dedication — and she shared it.

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 28, 2020

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

Psalms 89

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Matthew 10:37-42

In today's Gospel, Jesus talks about who is "worthy" of him. This is not the same word we repeat when we echo the centurion and pray, "Lord, I am not worthy." The soldier's word for "worthy" meant something like "sufficiently dignified." When Jesus says, "Whoever loves father, mother … son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," his word for worthy means something more like "equal to, ready," or "capable."

The sayings we hear today come at the end of Jesus' instructions to the disciples as they were about to set off on their first mission. That context suggests that Jesus wanted to shake the disciples into asking themselves, "Am I ready for this?" They had to comprehend that this was not just an adventure or sales trip, not even another round of "follow the leader." They were about to go out on their own to share what they believed was the ultimate good news. Were they really dedicated enough to communicate the Gospel message?

This reading is one of our many reminders that Christianity is much more than an armchair activity or a prie-dieu proposition. In effect, Jesus is telling the disciples:

"Nothing, no commitment, no love, no desire, can be more important than this task." He went on to assure them, "It will cost you your life, and it will give you your life's meaning."

Jesus stated the price in no uncertain terms: "You must take up your cross and follow me." If they wondered what that meant in practice, all they needed to do was watch him. When Jesus approached any situation, he saw it with the eyes of a prophet, that is, from God's perspective. He recognized the gaps between what is and what could be. When there was a need for healing or relief from demonic influence, that is, where God's reign was being thwarted, he always responded with effective creativity. Newton's physics explains what would happen next: Actions precipitate reactions — and in Jesus' case, the reactions were often vehemently negative.

The crux of it is that when someone frustrates the demonic powers aligned against human wholeness, those forces and their human minions react with all the evil they can spew out, victimizing anyone who champions others in need. The cross has always been a prophet's first reward.

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But Jesus didn't stop there. He also promised, "If you lose your life for my sake, you will find it." This means that his disciples can be like him, that we never need accept the unacceptable or tolerate the intolerable. The disciples of Jesus live and work to demonstrate that there is an alternative to "the way things have always been." Our mission is to offer proof that the forces working against life are doomed. The more we believe and act on this Gospel truth, the more it becomes a reality in and through us.

That is what the Christian vocation is all about. It's not essentially a matter of whether we are priests, teachers, religious, cooks, physicians, farmers or carpenters. The crux of the matter is whether or not we are willing, whether our commitment is equal to the task before us. We are called to the kind of prophetic dedication that will lead people to know Christ's love because they have met us. Jesus said exactly that when he said, "Whoever receives you, receives me."

Finally, we should remember that in this Gospel Jesus commissioned a community, not individuals. No one of us will ever be sufficiently worthy or equal to take up

Jesus' mission. Spouses share in each other's vocation, communities are called together to create the physical, psychic and spiritual spaces that heal the wounds and divisions of the world. As we are followers of Jesus, our every love fits uniquely into our mission. Rather than limit our focus and care, as Christians, our love for father, mother, son, daughter, friend and lover can make us ever more worthy, ever more ready and able to love without limit.

[St. Joseph Sr. Mary M. McGlone serves on the congregational leadership team of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.]

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A version of this story appeared in the **June 12-25, 2020** print issue under the headline: Love makes us worthy.