

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C

I Kings 19: 16b, 19-21
Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
Gal 5: 1, 13-18
Lk 9: 51-62

Stephen J. Baker, O.S.A.

"Let me just answer one more email."

"I'll be right with you. I just have to return one more phone call."

"Hold on, my cell phone is ringing."

"Sorry, this won't take long..."

Sound familiar? All of us at one time or another has said this to a family member or friend who is waiting for us. Some of us make our companions wait quite a long time – the movie has already started, the specials at the restaurant have long run dry, the train has already left the station! Some of us never get out of the office, turn off the computer, or hang up the phone. All of us have been players in this make 'em wait game; some of us have even made a career of it!

The gospel reading from Luke this weekend is indeed a challenge for all of us. What is Jesus doing to these poor people who want to follow him but have responsibilities to take care of? Care of parents is important, is it not? Even Elijah in the first reading allows Elisha to

take his leave of his family and friends before he returns to become Elijah's disciple. It seems like a reasonable request. So why doesn't Jesus cut these folks the same slack?

Scripture scholars tell us that Jesus is using the device of *hyperbole* or exaggeration to show us how important the Kingdom of God is and that Jesus is challenging us to get our priorities in order. Jesus invites us to see that our following of him and our participation in the Reign of God is so paramount that it should have priority over everything else – parents and siblings, extended family and friends, work and play, cell phones and computers. Does this mean that we need to abandon these significant people and life activities? I don't think so. What it does mean, however, is that the recognition of the presence of the Kingdom of God and our relationship with the Lord should permeate and inform every dimension of our lives – all of our relationships and all of our activities. The bottom line is that our relationship with Jesus comes first! This means we have to, perhaps more often, hang up the phone, turn off the computer and leave the email until tomorrow so that we might experience the presence of Jesus through Word and sacrament, prayer, and time with family and friends.

Our holy father Saint Augustine, in one of his sermons, challenges his listeners (and us as well) to look at the order of our "loves" in life. He writes in one of his Sermons, a commentary on this weekend's gospel, the following:

He [Jesus] taught us what is written in the Song of Songs, where the Church says, *Set love in order with me*. What can *Set love in order toward me* mean? Establish grades, and give

to each what is due. Do not subordinate things that come first to things that come after. Love your parents but, put God before your parents (Sermon 100, 1-3).

So where do we find ourselves in the face of Augustine's words? Does our relationship with Jesus come first or is the following of Jesus something we will eventually get to only after we have answered all the emails and returned all the phone calls?