

A THEME OF SERVICE & HUMILITY

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2 July 2023

There is a theme of service and humility in our reading this Sunday.

Reflect on our Mathew journey this year. The Kingdom of Heaven can be here amongst us if we follow and act on the teachings of Jesus. To be light on the hill that draws people to us: to act and speak in a manner that welcomes and offers dignity. Metanoia – to change people's hearts and minds. Very much so, discipleship is an action-based theology – actions, not necessarily words.

Let us contextualise our reading today according to the time it was written in.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me.

The ancient world was tied to families and communities. When you journeyed to another town, you were warmly welcomed. However, the welcoming community implicitly included the people who sent the guest and all they represented. So, when a community welcomed a disciple of Jesus, that meant the community would receive Jesus himself and the one who sent him, God the Father.

In today's reading, Jesus uses 'little ones', which in Greek translates as '*mikros*'. We would normally assume that this could refer to children, yet Matthew may refer to Jesus' disciples, who are young in faith and particularly vulnerable.

Interestingly, the phrase '*least of these*' translates to *elachistos*, a superlative of *mikros*, the little ones. Consider the dynamic of ancient families, with children at the bottom of the pecking order. When we say the least of these, we refer to the little ones.

Jesus also uses the word reward, *mythos*, which in Matthew is something earned, an inheritance, a pure gift. We receive gifts.

Now put these theological understandings together when we read our Gospel today, and you may arrive at: those who welcome and care for the needs of little ones welcome and care for Jesus himself. To receive Jesus is to receive the one who sent him and become heirs to all the Father must give.

And now we are the church, sent by God to proclaim the word and good deeds, to bring God's Kingdom. We are the current disciples.

The hospitality of discipleship - this is our mission –

In my experience, hospitality is a two-way door, like the ones you see in some restaurants: you may have one in your home. You receive people into your home and can go out into the world.

Think about our community which has and continues to welcome so many people through our doors. Think of how many in our community go out into the world and serve others, taking the Good News with them. Think about those who, in their vocation, go to the far ends of the community and live out the gospel in word and good deeds.

This is an affirmation for us as a church community. However, do we stop and offer a cup of cold water?

Our Collect today: Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.

There is a pastoral responsibility for all of us. Catherine McAuley referred to this as a 'Comfortable cup of tea'. Like Jesus, we move outside the walls and engage with people in their lives, taking time to listen deeply and be in relationships with others. Our discipleship involves putting others and their ability to experience the Love and Kingdom of God before any needs we may have. We are called to be missionaries who are outwards reaching, not inwards thinking.

If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.

Today's scripture has a critical word in the final sentence that we should focus on: '**not**'. Not is suggestive of us automatically being given the reward of the Kingdom by Jesus, the one sent by God, and it is our responsibility to give this to others, or we choose to lose it for ourselves. We are given the inheritance of the Kingdom, but when we do not give it to others, they cannot experience it.

Deacon Clint McGoldrick

Readings:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/070223.cfm>

