

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year "A"

"Whoever receives you receives me"

I once read the story of a woman named Beth, sitting at an airport terminal, and waiting to board a plane. She was sitting there with several other people who were also waiting, whom she did not know.

As she waited, she pulled out her Bible and started reading. All of a sudden she felt as if the people sitting there around her, were looking at her. She looked up, but realized that they were looking just over her head, in the direction right behind her.

She turned around to see what everyone was looking at, and when she did, she saw a stewardess pushing a wheelchair, with the ugliest old man sitting in it, that she had ever seen before. She said he had this long white hair that was all tangled and such a mess. His face was really, really wrinkled, and he didn't look friendly at all. She said she didn't know why, but she felt drawn to the man, and thought at first that God wanted her to witness to him. In her mind she said she was thinking, "Oh, God, please, not now, not here."

No matter what she did, she couldn't get the man off of her mind, and all of a sudden she knew what God wanted her to do. She was supposed to brush this old man's hair.

She went and knelt down in front of the old man, and said "Sir, may I have the honor of brushing your hair for you?"

He said "What?"

She thought, "Oh great, he's hard of hearing." Again, a little louder, she said, "Sir, may I have the honor of brushing your hair for you?"

He answered, "If you are going to talk to me, you are going to have to speak up, I am practically deaf."

So this time, she was almost yelling, "Sir may I please have the honor of brushing your hair for you?"

Everyone was watching to see what his response would be. The old man just looked at her confused, and said "Well, I guess if you really want to."

She said, "I don't even have a brush, but I thought I would ask anyway."

He said, "Look in the bag hanging on the back of my chair, there is a brush in there."

So she got the brush out and started brushing his hair. She has a little girl with long hair, so she has had lots of practice getting tangles out, and knew how to be gentle with him. She worked for a long time, until every last tangle was out.

Just as she was finishing up, she heard the old man crying, and she went and put her hands on his knees, kneeling in front of him again looking directly into his eyes, and said "Sir, do you know Jesus?"

He answered, "Yes, of course I know Jesus. You see, my bride told me she couldn't marry me unless I knew Jesus, so I learned all about Jesus, and asked Him to come into my heart many years ago, before I married my bride."

He continued, "You know, I am on my way home to go and see my wife. I have been in the hospital for a long time, and had to have a special surgery in this town far from my home. My wife couldn't come with me, because she is so frail herself."

He said, "I was so worried about how terrible my hair looked, and I didn't want her to see me looking so awful, but I couldn't brush my hair, all by myself."

Tears were rolling down his cheeks, as he thanked Beth for brushing his hair. He thanked her over and over again.

She was crying, people all around witnessing this were crying, and as they were all boarding the plane, the stewardess, who was also crying, stopped her, and asked, "Why did you do that?"

And right there was the opportunity, the door that had been opened to share with someone else, the love of God. We don't always understand God's ways, but be ready, He may use us to meet the need of someone else, like He met the need of this old man, and in that moment, also calling out to a lost soul who needed to know about His love (Author Unknown).

When Jesus in today's gospel says "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" Jesus is not asking us to hate anyone. Jesus loves His parents and was obedient to them. Jesus is telling us that the desire to please God should be the greatest desire of the human heart. Every other thing should be secondary to it or better still that every other thing should serve to bring us to the knowledge and love of God.

For the Jewish people, love of father and mother is the fourth commandment given by God and should be obeyed at all times. Family is the most treasured asset of a Jew, but in the new dispensation, Jesus says that when it comes to doing the will of God, not even the love of father or mother should stand as an obstacle to it.

Christianity is a practical religion. No one can pretend to be a Christian. Knowledge of God is good but doing the will of God is better. The life of a Christian is a life of sacrifice and to follow Jesus is a radical option one must make for oneself. Our parents could support us in the journey, yet, it is the individual who has what it takes to do the will God.

There comes a time when we need to care less of what people may think or what they will say and go ahead to do what God wants us to do. This is the radical option that a Christian has to put into practice in order to follow Jesus.

Those who take this radical leap of faith are promised a reward by Jesus "whoever receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward." No good deed done for God's sake will go unrewarded. Therefore, the road to heaven can only be found here on earth. Everything we do here and now matters. As we go into the world this day, let us be mindful of what we think, say and do, for the good God who rewards what is done in secret shall reward us both in this life and in the life to come.