

The prophet Elijah, my dear friends, who in our first reading is ordered by the Lord to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet in Israël, must have been quite an impossible man. He threw his prophet's cloak on the unexpected Elisha as a sign of his election and requested him to follow. Elisha was ploughing his field, and quite naturally wants to say good bye to his parents first. But he is reprimanded by Elijah: "Take it or leave it!" is what Elijah tells him, I am inviting you, not forcing!

And Jesus, in today's gospel story, conducts himself quite as impossible as Elijah towards those who want to follow Him or who He invites to become part of his group. Without any real consideration He also tells them: "Take it or leave it". "No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"!

The gospel does not tell us how the people reacted who were thus called to follow Jesus. Did they do what they intended to do: 'go and bury their father first', or 'say good bye to the people at home'? Or did they accept the absolute demand made on them and followed Jesus without any further 'ifs and buts'? We do not know. But we are told how Elisha reacted to the request made on him by Elijah: "Elisha turned away, took the pair of oxen and slaughtered them. He used the plow for cooking the oxen, then gave to the men, who ate. He then rose and followed Elijah and became his servant.

Our God is an impossible God. He just is not human. We can not follow Him a little bit. We cannot become part-time followers, part-time christians. God does not want our time, our strength, our talents. He wants us!

This past week in Mexico, two of our fellow-jesuits were murdered, shot dead for protecting a man who came to their church seeking shelter. They did what they felt called to do. They did not first think of their own safety. They gave everything, not just a little. They gave their life.

God is quite demanding. He expects all of us. Not just the bit we can miss. Not the leftovers of our busy lives. God invites us into his friendship without restrictions. I suppose that the two Mexican Jesuits could have run away or could have ducked for safety. They did not. They stood up for life and justice as they felt asked to do, without reservation, without counting the cost.

And that brings us to a second vital point of this entire issue of God's call. God calls all of us, the entire man or woman, but at the same time: He does not force us to follow his call. We are always free to turn away from God's demands. We are free not to follow our vocation. Elijah did not force Elisha: "Have I done anything to you?" he asks. And the men, invited by Jesus to follow Him, could quite freely have said: "Thank you but No! You are asking too much from me." Like the rich young man whom Jesus invited to sell everything he possessed and give his money to the poor. He was invited to join Jesus' inner-circle of friends. But he could not bring himself to leave everything

behind. So he left and Jesus was sorry to see him go. But He did not force him. He was free. Elisha also was free. He could have returned Elijah's cloak to its rightful owner and continue to plough his field. But by killing the oxen and using his plough for firewood he did leave everything behind to follow his calling.

Everyone of us, my dear friends, has his or her own calling. Not a single person is forgotten by our Lord and allowed to stay idle in the marketplace because no one hired him or her. We are all created because we are meant to contribute to the wellbeing of our fellow-men, of society and of our common home. Everyone has specific talents and tasks. But our Lord only calls, hires, invites, never forces us to do his Holy Will.

Somehow in our creation there is an inbuilt reward for everyone heeding God's call. Elisha, following his calling and becoming Elijah's servant, turned out to be a great prophet in Israëel who was a blessing to God's people. The rich young man, on the other hand, who did not find the courage in himself to rid himself of his possessions, went away sad. Following your calling, not looking for great earnings and prestige, but for the accomplishment of the tasks given to you, brings you a fulfilled life and certainly does not leave you sad.

The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, famous writer and Nobel Prize winner, wrote a short story which illustrates the point that the more generous you live the more generous you will be rewarded.

A Buddhist monk, who had to beg for food to survive, once had a very good day. Some well-off person poured into his sack a generous portion of wheat. That day the monk was grateful and happy as he continued on his way. Another monk, seeing him so joyful and in a good mood came up to him and asked for a bit of his wealth. But our monk shrank away and looked at the other in dismay. He held on to his sack of wheat and felt as if the other was robbing him of his bounty. Then again he remembered that the Buddha urges his followers to give to anyone who asks and carefully opening his sack he gave his fellow-monk one grain of his wheat. Coming back in his monastery he opened his sack, proud of the rich amount of wheat that he was able to contribute. But what did he find? In his sack, on top of his wheat he found one single grain of gold.

This is a wisdom Jesus also remarked on in his days. Mark, writing his gospel remembered Jesus saying: "Take notice of what you are hearing: The amount you measure out is the amount you will be given." Amen.