

De Krijtberg. July 2, 2023. Thirteenth Sunday through the year. Mt 10:37-42, other readings 2 Kings 4:8-11.14-16a, Rom 6:3-4.8-11

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A NEW COMMUNITY

Whoever loses his life for my sake will keep it.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Difficult words that Jesus addresses to his apostles when he sends them out to spread his message. Jesus is not alone with this statement. An ancient Jewish text asks who you should help first: your father or your teacher, when both have lost something, or have to lift a heavy burden, or are in prison. The answer is that you should help your teacher first, and only then your father: your father put you into this world, but your teacher, who teaches you wisdom, brings you to the life of the world to come.

Father, mother, son and daughter all have to do with yourself. You received life from your parents, and you live on in your children. Parents and children belong to yourself, you cannot see yourself without them, they are part of your life. This was especially felt in earlier times and in the ancient East. At that time, the individual was much more absorbed in the family community than is the case in our society today. What Jesus and that ancient Jewish text wish to say is that there is more than your own life within your own family. A new family emerges around Jesus, united not by the bonds of blood, but by the ideals of the 'kingdom of God' or God's new world. Already earlier in Matthew's gospel, we heard how James and John left their father Zebedee and followed Jesus (4:22).

There is more than one's own life. Jesus points to the fullness that lies beyond one's own life. In this context, I also quote the following words from today's gospel: *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* To keep his life is to hold on to yourself and not go beyond. Losing your life means going beyond yourself, opening to what is more than yourself.

Whoever receives you..., receives the one who sent me.

The first half of the gospel reading is about the apostles, who had opened themselves up to Jesus and the new world of God. The second half is about the people receiving the apostles, open to their message. When they receive the apostles, they receive more than just the apostles: they receive Jesus, they open themselves to God and his new world. To use the words of the gospel: *Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.*

Jesus uses the word *reward* in this context: *Whoever receives a prophet... will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man, will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink... I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.* When Jesus speaks of prophets and righteous men to be received, he means the apostles. The apostles are also referred to as *these little ones* who are given a glass of water. Those who are open to the apostles and to their message receive the reward of a prophet or a righteous person. So taking in a prophet is as meritorious as prophesying itself. And listening to the apostles' words is as important as the words they speak. For speaking and listening belong together. Pronouncing the message is only half, listening to the message is the other half. Without those who listen, the prophet is nowhere, he is 'a voice crying in the wilderness'. If the hearer does not absorb the word that is spoken, it is as if the word was not spoken at all.

When you open yourself to what the apostles have to say to you, you will enter a new, so to speak, divine dimension. The apostles, who left their own homes and families, form together with their audience a new family, rooted in God. We too, who listen to the words of the gospel, belong to that family.