

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11 and Matthew 10:37-42

Somewhere between Thoreau, NM, where I once lived, and Gallup, thirty miles west, is a village called Continental Divide. This bump-in-the-road is part of the Great Divide, which stretches from the Bering Strait in Alaska down both North and South America to Tierra del Fuego, at the southernmost tip. This line is a watershed, a dividing ridge between drainage systems. All waters to the west flow into the Pacific and all the waters to the east flow into the Atlantic. Crazy, right? You would never know by looking at this little cluster of buildings that it was part of such a grand geographical turning point. All it meant to me was that I still had twenty-three miles to go to Gallup.

When you look at your life, what have been the watersheds? When did something dramatically change you? Where can you say, "Before I lived like this and after that point, I lived in a different way"? Maybe it was a marriage, a divorce or a death. Maybe it was a health scare or the birth of a child. Maybe it was an encounter, a book or an experience. What have been your watersheds?

Did you list your baptism in those moments? Why not? For cradle Catholics, it is hard to do that, right? I mean, no one reported a noticeable change in me, although my mom might have hoped I would start sleeping through the night. Nevertheless, at some point, hopefully, each of us made a choice to be Christian. Paul says this moment of choice should mark as well a lifestyle choice in line with the person we have chosen to associate, Jesus. We now live – or ought to – *in Christ Jesus*. Paul wants us to grab hold of the significance of that phrase, *in Christ Jesus*. Baptism re-creates us so that we are intimately immersed in the life and destiny of Christ. Our lives should be a mirror of Jesus' life: Compassion alone should guide all our actions. We should lead by serving. We should be close enough to God to call God "Daddy" and mean it. We should lay down our lives for others and allow God to raise us up. In other words, according to Paul, we are now the same as Christ Jesus and our lives should express that.

With that rousing exhortation from Paul, we head to the gospel where Jesus wraps up his Missionary Discourse. He describes how to think and act as he does. Jesus hits us with "Whoever loves father or mother... son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" and "whoever does not take up their cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." In Jesus' day -- when one's family was the only social safety net and when the tortures of the cross were reserved for rebels and slaves – these requirements for discipleship would have been deal-breakers for most people. And they still are.

Jesus' shocking language points out that a Christian must recognize the spiritual reality of life. Often we dance through life, out of touch with God. Then, even familial relationships become self-centered: we invest in them so that we can feel good, avoid loneliness or have someone to care for us or to brag about. But, if we place God first, all other loves will flow from God. St. Francis de Sales wrote that our friendship with God is both the model for and the enricher of our love of friends and family; "[our friendship] will be excellent because it comes from God, excellent because it leads to God, excellent because its bond will endure eternally in God." Love for God and love for family are not separate things, but layers of the same fullness of life. By raising the paradox of the cross, Jesus reminds us that love will require tremendous sacrifice and we must at least be available for that sacrifice.

Paul says we are baptized into Jesus' death. We associate with Christ at precisely the time when all hope seemed lost. We associate with Christ at this watershed moment in his life because he loved most perfectly then. When we ask Jesus to be with us in our suffering, he opens opportunities for love to grow, for new life to begin. Our nation's struggle with COVID-19, with racism and indeed with our very identity calls us to live in a radically different way. We live in a watershed moment. Let us live *in Christ Jesus* in this moment, lest we fail to recognize the turning point it is.

- ❖ Where can you say, "Before I lived like this and after that point, I lived in a different way"?
- ❖ At this watershed in America, discuss with others what needs to be different. Be sure to talk with Jesus about this as well.