

15. June 2024

Go back again; for what have I done to you

1 Kgs 19:19-21

*In those days, Elijah departed from there, and found Eli'sha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Eli'jah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Eli'jah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?"<sup>1</sup> And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Eli'jah, and ministered to him.*

Elisha's call and his immediate response recall the scene in which the disciples were called by the Lord and left everything behind to follow Him. In this case, Elijah allows his successor to say goodbye to his family. Jesus, on the other hand, shows us even more clearly the importance of such a vocation. From the moment we are called, we must dedicate ourselves exclusively to the kingdom of God: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). Or again: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37).

It is important to understand the dimension of a vocation such as that received by Elisha. It is in no way opposed to the family, nor does it diminish its importance in the natural order of life. The commandment to honour one's father and mother remains valid, of course.

But such a vocation is part of the supernatural dimension and is a direct call to enter into the service of God. In order to be totally free to respond to this call, natural relationships take a back seat. Concern for the welfare of the family becomes a universal concern for the purposes of the kingdom of God.

When a person receives such a call, God gives him a great sign of his love, and we can be sure that his vocation will also be a blessing for his natural family, even if they often do not understand it at first.

The celibacy of Catholic priests must be understood in the context of this particular

vocation. Their life reflects the life of the Son of God, who did not marry. We could look at many aspects of this way of life which would allow us to further discover its value. But in the context of today's reading, we need to meditate in particular on the character of vocation, in that it takes a person out of the natural context that usually dominates human life.

In following the Lord, every Christian must transform his habits and mindset. As St Paul teaches us, "*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*" (Col 3:2). If this is true for the Christian living in the world, who logically has much more to do with the daily realities of life, in the spirit of Christ, it is even more true for those who have been called to leave the world and have been freed from many earthly burdens.

It would be paradoxical to leave the world for the sake of Jesus and then willingly continue to engage with worldly things in a way that binds the heart.

Those who have received a special vocation to follow Christ should keep within themselves the words of the prophet Elijah: "*Go back again; for what have I done to you*", because they too have been "clothed with the mantle of the prophet" and have a special share in the prophetic vocation.

*"Remember what I have done to you"...* And the sentence could go on like this: Consider your vocation as a special call of love that calls you to the responsibility of responding to it. Therefore, cling to me alone, so that I may send you, so that I may live in you, so that you may become a blessing for others..."