

HOMILY — SUNDAY OT 13 A

2 Kgs 4:8-12a, 14-16

Ps 89 R/. Forever I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord.

Rom 6:3-4, 8-11

Mt 10:37-42

I remember a conversation I had with my dad years ago, when I was beginning to accept that I might be called to the Priesthood. At the time I was dating a young lady and we were talking about the possibility of Marriage, and I asked my dad how I could love God above all else and still love a wife with my whole heart. He answered that in Marriage a husband loves God above all things by loving Him through his wife.

This hits to the core of our Gospel message today, as the Lord challenges us to love Him above all else: *Whoever loves father or mother [son or daughter] more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37). Jesus isn't exaggerating to make a point here; rather He's recalling the 1st Commandment and the great "shema Israel": *Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might* (Dt 6:4).

Jesus is warning us against making others the first object of our love and attention. He's warning us not to be attached to His gifts, but to Him. Our parents, our children, our families..., they're all gifts from God. They're indeed great gifts to be treasured, but not treasured more than the Giver Himself. Instead, like my father explained, we're called to love God through them by recognising that they're in fact treasured gifts given by God. The love we owe our families — and anyone else for that matter —, must be a love that's first and foremost directed to God. To love our families and friends with gratitude to God means that we understand them to be gifts from Him and opportunities to love Him through loving them.

It all comes down to where our hearts, minds, and lives are focussed. It's about not making people or things into idols but keeping God first in our lives. It's a question of what we make the priority in our lives.

It's a beautiful message for us to receive as we celebrate Canada Day this week, because our country was founded on this very principle (I don't know if you knew that). In 1534, when Jacques Cartier first landed on the Canadian mainland, he planted a Cross on the shore. He did this to claim Canada for the King of France, but also as a symbol of claiming it for Christ. He could've easily placed the King's flag or some other royal symbol, but instead he chose the Cross, claiming this land in way similar to when we greet children for Baptism and claim them for Christ by the Sign of the Cross. From the very beginnings of colonialization, what was to become Canada has been dedicated to Jesus by this great symbol of the Cross.

This was echoed in the 1982 Constitution, which begins by stating, "Canada is founded upon the principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law". And the Charter of Rights and Freedoms lists the freedom of conscience and religion as the first freedom of its citizens

(art. 2.). Despite what so many like to repeat — that God has no place in politics or the public forum —, our Constitution decidedly says otherwise: God is supreme.

Sadly, today we've forgotten this root of our nation. Instead of being oriented to God, we've changed the focus to ourselves. God's no longer given the supremacy; love of self is now supreme. We've made individualism and self-determination the idols of our day. This is why abortion, sexual immorality, euthanasia, and recreational drug use are being so strongly promoted. It's all about the self, all about making the self the focus of our lives. Well, if Jesus says that loving others more than Him makes us unworthy to be His disciples, how much more unworthy of Him will we be if self-love, self-worship, is supreme?!

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to examine the priorities and orientations of our life: are we directed to Him, or to something else? We need to orient ourselves to Christ, individually and societally. We must recognise again that supremacy belongs to God — and to God alone!

And this isn't done through lobbying, protests, or advertising campaigns; it done through our own conversion — mine and yours. When I begin to live according to the Gospel, according to the love and teachings of Jesus, then I can begin to change the world around me. If you and I begin to seek Jesus and to build our lives around Him as the centre and object of our lives, then we begin to change our community. If each of us did that, we'd transform the world! And this, my brothers and sisters, is what Jesus invites us to do: to draw near to Him, to be loved by Him, to be healed and transformed by Him, so that in turn, we might transform the world. There will be no peace, no healing and reconciliation, no lasting change without this conversion.

As I've said before, this is why our daily life of prayer and Scripture is so important. Unless we spend time with Jesus, allowing Him to heal, teach, and transform us — which is what happens in prayer —, then we're doomed to follow the spirit of the world into selfishness, hatred, and destruction. Unless we love God first, with all our heart, mind and strength, we have nothing left but sin and death.

The Gospel today doesn't just invite us to a self-examination, it invites us to a choice: God or the world, God or me. Who are we choosing?