

13 Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 26, 2010
Fr. Michael Renninger

It was not a good day. I was feeling lousy, because a friend of mine had called to say that he was leaving the priesthood. He is a wonderful priest. He loves ministry, but he feels that he must leave.

When I found out that my friend was leaving ministry, it hit me very hard, so I went to Stony Point for therapeutic shopping. As I sat at lunch, I stewed in my own self pity.

“It’s not easy being a priest these days, “ I said to myself. “The abuse scandals have shaken people’s faith in us; parents aren’t sure if they can trust us with their kids; many Catholics don’t value celibacy anymore; some folks are mad that I could get ordained, when women and married men cannot. I could have made more money as an Episcopalian – poor me. Poor Mike. It isn’t easy being a priest today.”

In the middle of that pity party, a family sat down next to me. It was a mother, a father, and three small children under the age of ten. Mom and dad looked frazzled. One of the girls had an ear ache. In between bites of food, mom and dad had frantic conversations – Who was attending the PTA meeting on Wednesday? What about the leak in the roof? And when can we go see your mother – her chemotherapy starts again next week.” When the parents announced that there was to be no dessert, two of the children started to cry. Mom caught my eye, shrugged, and said, “It’s not easy being a Mom today.....”

Sometimes I need a good spiritual slap in the face. There I was, wallowing in how hard it is to be a priest today, when this overextended Mom looked at me and said, “It’s not easy being a mom.”

On Saturday, June 26, 1993, I was ordained a priest at the Cathedral. Today is my 17th anniversary. And it’s true - it is not easy to be a priest today, due to a culture that does not value chastity and faithfulness and self-giving. But... it is not easy to be *married* today...due to a culture that does not value chastity & faithfulness and self giving. Come to think of it - It is not easy to be a Catholic *college student* today, in a dorm culture that does not value chastity, or faithfulness, or self giving. It is not easy to be a *Christian* today, in a culture which often mocks integrity, mocks our attempts to bring another perspective to daily decisions. It is not easy to be a lawyer of integrity, a doctor of integrity, a teacher with integrity - a student, a cook, a janitor, with integrity. Simply put – it ain’t easy to live the Gospel these days! It is not easy to live out our vocation these days, whatever that vocation may be.

Today’s scriptures tell us that it has NEVER been easy to listen faithfully to God, and to live out that vocation which God has called us to. When Elisha was called by God to carry on the ministry of the prophet Elijah, God asked Elisha to leave everything else behind – God asked Elisha to leave behind his father, mother, home, so that he could go

where God wanted to lead. When Elisha slaughtered his oxen, he was not being cruel – he was making it clear that there was *no turning back*. If this “God thing” did not work out, he could not come back home and resume his old way of life as a farmer, walking behind the oxen to plow the fields. If he wanted to follow God, it was going to cost him everything.

As Jesus invites his disciples to go with him toward Jerusalem, he also makes it clear that this vocation, this calling, will not be easy. If you’re going to follow Jesus, then you have to understand that some will not welcome you – you may not be able to lay your head down where you thought you could – and you may have to leave behind the relationships, comforts, HOME, where you found so much security in the past. This Christian way of life is not easy!

And for me, one line from today’s Gospel reading puts it all into perspective: Luke says: “Jesus resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” And what was waiting for him in Jerusalem? *Calvary* - where death gets defeated, and sin is forgiven, at the cost of Christ’s own blood. In other words, Jesus’ own vocation cost him everything. He willingly paid the final price to love us, and to be faithful to us.

So, if you are looking for an easy life...then do not choose the Christian life. If you are looking for a God who will never challenge you...then do not following the God of Jesus Christ. If you are looking for a faith that will never pinch or change you...then do not be a Catholic. If you are looking for a vocation that will always be easy, a vocation which never costs you, then do not be a priest, or a nun, or a husband, or a wife, or a person of integrity, or a parent, or a Christian. If you are looking for an always-comfortable life, in an always-comfortable church, in an always comfortable-vocation.... You will need to go somewhere else. It is not here.

It is not here, because we follow a savior who resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem. We follow a savior who did very hard things in order to reveal his love for us. We follow a savior who was willing to work until exhaustion, walk as far as needed, pray on his knees into the wee hours of the morning; we follow a savior who was willing to bear the brunt of lies, bear a cross, and pay the final price...all in order to be faithful to us, to love us, to save us. That is who we follow here. That is the Gospel we preach here. That is who we are called to be here. It was not easy for Jesus. It will not be easy for us.

Several years ago, I was talking to a college student. He had every option in life available before him. And this young man said to me, “I am not sure exactly what God wants me to do with my life, but I am sure of this: I know that God wants me to make a difference. And I know it will be hard.” (2x)

Well, that young man was ordained to the priesthood recently. And he gives me great hope. I do not know exactly what your vocation in life may be, but I do know this – God wants you to make a difference. And I know it will be hard. After all that is what Jesus did, that is what the saints have done, and that is what you and I can do, if we follow Christ closely, and listen for his call.