

Homily by Bishop Jaime Soto for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 30, 2013

In the gospel today (Lk. 9:51-62), Jesus was in haste to arrive in Jerusalem. He knew, and we know by historical hindsight, what awaited him in the Holy City. The haste of the Lord may trigger a biblical flashback. Turning back the pages of the gospel according to Luke (Lk. 2:41-52), we may recall the story of the young Jesus explaining to his worried parents why he had stayed behind in Jerusalem, hanging out with the scribes and Pharisees in the Temple. He said to his distraught Mother Mary, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?" In the passage for today, with an urgent determination, Jesus was returning to Jerusalem to be about his Father's work and would not be distracted.

While on the way, Jesus dealt with several distractions. A Samaritan village treated Jesus and his disciples badly. Some of the disciples wanted to settle the dispute by calling down fire upon the village. The Lord would have none of that. Another disciple was ready to follow Jesus. The Lord reminded him that material concerns should not delay them. Even family matters were not to hinder the Lord or his followers.

To be fair, these concerns were not trivial. Jesus' responses can appear callous, indifferent, even imprudent. The Lord's heart and mind was centered on his Father's mission and the good he was still to do. He wanted neither himself nor his disciples to lose sight of what he was called to do, his sacrificial mission on the hill of Calvary outside the City of Jerusalem. All else, as good or necessary as it may be, must be judged in the light of the Father's work. As Jesus repeated to his disciples in the gospel today, "Proclaim the Kingdom of God."

Speaking of distractions, we have all experienced a roller-coaster week, with various news stories that unsettle us, confuse us, and challenge us. The week began with the disturbing criminal court case involving one of our priests. The following day, the Supreme Court overturned a significant portion of the Voter Rights Act of 1965. Later in the week, the Supreme Court rendered two decisions regarding the definition of marriage. The US Senate passed an immigration reform bill filled with difficult compromises and the House remains reluctant to do any better. The California legislature, in the meantime, continues to push for two measures that will expand abortion by lowering the standard of care, putting both mother and child at even

greater risk. After a week like this, one can easily share the frustration of the disciples, James and John in the gospel, and wish that fire would rain down from heaven.

We can easily fall into the trap of letting these issues define who we are. We can too easily get caught in the contentious, controversial nature of these issues. Our language becomes partisan, angry, adversarial, bitter and then we no longer proclaim the kingdom. As Jesus pushed his disciples forward on the way to Jerusalem, the same Lord pushes us toward the gospel, a gospel that gives life and hope to all, good news for the dignity and possibility of the human person. St. Paul reminded the Galatians long ago, “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all.” (Gal. 6.9-10) We must speak of the good and do the good we can. This is what Jesus was determined to do in the gospel, even at the cost of his own life. In the end, doing good will be the most persuasive message we have.

We should not let the prevalent controversies of the day define us by what we are against. The gospel of Jesus is a “yes” to the life and dignity of the human person. We must first define ourselves by the “yes” of the gospel. Our yes to Jesus and His Kingdom defines what we stand against, not the other way around.

We believe in the dignity of the human person as created by God from the moment of conception. We cherish the long historical tradition where the union of a man and woman in marriage shares in God’s creative, life-giving work. We stand in solidarity with the weak and forgotten in our society, especially the unborn, the poor, and the immigrant. We want each person to participate in building up a more just and humane society. We want our churches and schools to be welcoming havens for all, especially children and young people.

The gospel of hope and life is what drove Jesus with such determination to Jerusalem. This gospel we are called to claim as our own and proclaim to the world. What we believe is not a reason to withdraw. It is an urgent reason to push ahead with the Spirit of Jesus. This is a Spirit that never tires of doing good.