

13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Year C

In his book *Under the Eye of the Clock* Christopher Nolan describes the way in which Joseph Meehan, who has cerebral palsy, seeks to escape from the limits that others impose on him. He describes the way in which some people pity him and pat him on the head, show revulsion towards him and turn away, veto his applications for schools and fail to recognize who he is as a person. The pain bites deeply into the heart of this sensitive boy and man. The writing is largely autobiographical since Christopher Nolan, after a difficult birth, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. With little physical movement, his life shows the achievement of overcoming his limitations. His book also shows the tireless love of his mother and the rest of his family.

Parents who have children with disabilities or special needs and the children themselves are examples of people who live Christian discipleship in dedicated, committed ways, but who rarely make the headlines of the news. Whilst there is perhaps much greater recognition relating to disability and special needs, many prejudices still exist. All of us have our fears when we meet somebody who is very different from ourselves.

In the Gospel. Jesus calls new disciples, inviting them to make a radical commitment to follow him. With resolve and determination, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem and shows absolute obedience to the Father's will, in spite of opposition. The people called to follow him are invited to see things from a new angle and to have their expectations challenged. In a similar way, Elisha becomes a follower of Elijah. In a symbolic gesture he becomes a follower and sets out on a new journey. He is now committed to becoming a disciple, despite the difficulties he may encounter. When the Samaritans reject Jesus, this does not deter his plan. Instead he seeks another way to reach his destination and to fulfil his ministry.

The commandment to "love your neighbour" is at the heart of Christian discipleship. And it's difficult for all of us. There is a constant tension between selfishness and walking the extra mile. St Paul describes how guidance by the Holy Spirit is necessary if we wish to overcome obstacles and see events and people from a new angle. The Spirit bestows the gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Through God's grace it is possible to go the extra mile.

There are many different ways in which the love of neighbour means going the extra mile. Firstly it means trying to understand the language, mind, and communication of the other person. It is a serious commitment to “walk in their shoes.” This is the challenge that Joseph Meehan presents to those around him. Can they listen to him and understand the way he communicates? Can they recognize his dignity although he is different?

Discipleship raises the question of how a parish includes and supports those who have special needs and how the parish expresses solidarity with those whose family members live with disabilities.

Christian discipleship involves taking up the cross. Resoluteness is needed to face obstacles and problems. Without God and the support of others this journey is lonely. As Christians we may take comfort in the belief that God transforms our efforts in ways that are beyond our wildest expectations, whatever difficulties we have to overcome.