

## 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Each January I set aside a few days to attend the annual conference of the North American Academy of Liturgy. As with other groups, the location moves around from city to city, and for a few days we take up residence in a hotel. We hear plenary addresses; we break into groups to discuss topics of more specific interest. Sometimes there's an outing to a local historical site. The conference concludes with a banquet. Because this is a faith-based organization, we include some other features: communal prayer and a collection for the needy.

Here's how the collection for the needy got started: Years ago, a couple members of the group told us they volunteered for an organization helping people who had no shelter for the night. They suggested that before leaving the conference, we bring to the final banquet any of the shampoo and lotion we'd otherwise leave behind in the room and donate it to their charity. We did this for a few years until someone observed that this offering wasn't costing us anything, but instead was forcing the hotel to contribute shampoo and lotion to the charity of our choice. We stopped the practice, and now we put envelopes on the tables at the banquet inviting people to contribute from their own resources toward a charity that the local committee has designated. We are also encouraged - instead of taking products from our hotel rooms - to leave a tip there for the unseen low-paid workers who look after us while we are visitors.

Whenever we travel from one location to another, whether for work or on holiday, we are often unmindful of the people who sacrifice themselves to ease the burden of our journey. Such was the case of Elisha the prophet, whom we meet in today's first reading. He traveled around to proclaim God's message. Coming once to Shunem, he met a "woman of influence" - probably a person of wealth or advanced political position. She offered to feed him, probably because he was a prophet. She then suggested to her husband that they let Elisha sleep in the spare room on their rooftop. He agreed; there is no whiff of hanky-panky in this story - just a desire to show hospitality.

Elisha wanted to reward the woman, and it's his servant Gehazi who came up with the idea. Servants see the world differently than prophets and persons of influence. Gehazi noted what Elisha had overlooked. He said, "She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years." Gehazi could see that she had influence in the community, but she needed help at home. At Elisha's bidding, Gehazi called the woman over, and Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son." And so it happened. On the cover of this week's bulletin you'll see an image of this woman, Elisha and Gehazi.

The story shows the value of both sides of hospitality. Jesus asked his disciples to provide a cup of cold water to little ones, and he promised that those who receive a prophet would receive a prophet's reward. We have many opportunities to receive friends, travelers, immigrants and refugees. We have equally as many opportunities to thank those who have received us when we need shelter, assistance, comfort, or guidance. We may feel false contentment when we let someone else provide for the needy, but Christ will surely reward those who receive visitors, and visitors who say thanks.

Sunday, July 2, 2017