

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Parochial—Dynamic or Narrow?

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/C

June 26, 2016 10:45 AM 1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21; Gal 5:1, 13-18; **Lk 9:51-62**

(Have we gone from being a dynamic agent of change in the kingdom to being a narrow, comfortable, and settled people?)

“Let the dead bury the dead.”

To your ears this might seem puzzling or even confusing. When I was a child and I heard that read, I imagined zombies digging graves. But it's not about zombies, and it's not puzzling. To Jewish ears this sounds impious, dishonorable. **Burying the dead was a pious practice and a solemn responsibility in Judaism** and in many other cultures—in most cultures. Even beyond Judaism caring for the remains of the dead is one of the chief features and distinguishing characteristics of human civilization. Anthropologists and archaeologists know they are dealing with human remains when it's all very neatly organized.

So Jesus is being very provocative in dismissing this kind of concern. Well, what's up? Well, what's up is a crucial alteration in the status quo. **For Jesus the status quo is no longer acceptable.** Something new is afoot, which he calls **the kingdom of God** or the reign of God. We actually don't know what he said because we only have the Greek version, but it's *basileia tou Theou*, kingdom of God. It means **God is breaking into human activities and human life in a totally new way**, in a radical way, beginning with Jesus himself, **the signs of which are of course these extraordinary healing and signs.** They are taking place in the wake of his movement.

But Jesus does not want to do all this by himself. This is a new movement, but it's not just about him, so **he is calling now people to help.** He is like a midwife needing other midwives in order to **assist at this new birthing that is taking place.** In contrast to the urgency of this call,

everything else, **all the other considerations, must desist. Ordinarily it might be very pious and proper to bury the dead, but not now, not when God is calling.**

Now the early Church lived with this sense of urgency. Sadly, psychologically **it's been impossible to keep a sense of urgency over two thousand years.** One of the terms for the Church in the Scripture is *parochoia*. This is the word we use as a root of our word parochial or parish. But it didn't mean parish; **it meant "people on the march."** It is the image of a dynamic process. The last thing Christ wanted for his Church was to be settled and comfortable; that was not his plan. **The Church Christ formed was to be on the move, open to God and aware of God's priorities.**

Now how do we take these fresh priorities and make them our own? That is a big problem, but it can be solved. But it takes thought. **It takes real serious reflection and it also takes enough conviction to motivate change.** The older we get the less we like change. The older we get the more we need to change. It's interesting and a little sad to note that the word **parochial**, which comes from *parochoia* **developed from a sense of dynamism to a sense of narrowness.** When you say someone is parochial today you mean narrow, limited, smallminded. That's not a compliment. Would that be true of us? Would that be true of our Church? **Is it parochial in the new sense or in the old sense? Have we gone from being a dynamic agent of change in the kingdom to being a narrow, comfortable, and settled people?** That's the question for the week.