

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – A

Even if we haven't said it in a while, most of us probably feel pretty comfortable around the Pledge of Allegiance.

When I was in school, we recited it everyday, and so, I don't think I will ever not be able to recite it by heart.

When immigrants receive citizenship in the U.S. they don't recite the pledge of allegiance.

Instead, they are required to take what's called The Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America.

It's quite a bit more robust than the pledge, and obligates the new citizens to certain responsibilities.

The oath requires the new citizen to absolutely and entirely renounce allegiance and fidelity to any foreign power;

to support and defend the country against all enemies;

and to bear true faith and allegiance.

The new citizen also promises to bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law.

The oath concludes that they do all this without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

For those of us born in this country, that sounds about right, and we are glad that those seeking citizenship profess their willingness to take seriously their civic duties.

One of the themes that ties together today's readings is the call to be authentic disciples of Jesus, and to be willing to take on the responsibilities that go along with that.

In the second reading St. Paul reminds us that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

That can come across pretty stark, especially if we are inclined to think of baptism as something we have done to our children so that they will not end up in limbo, or for other reasons like family harmony or just because we've always done it that way.

Paul looks at baptism and an event in which we become changed in a fundamental way and are incorporated into a new reality that brings with it the grace of new life in the Spirit, even as it demands of us a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom of God.

While it is important to recognize that Jesus' comments about the priority of love of God in the lives of the apostles is addressed first and foremost to those he called to share in his ministry of proclaiming the kingdom,

None of us, as Christians, get off the hook. All of us are called to participate in the mission of the Church to be heralds of the gospel as our circumstances allow.

The division of labor in the church does not go so far as to give any of us a pass when it comes to participating in the life

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of Christ and fostering what God is working to accomplish in the world.

That means that each of us has to come to terms with the reality of the grace of our own baptism—how we have been imbued with the Holy Spirit to cooperate in bringing the kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace and justice, a kingdom of love and reconciliation, a kingdom that begins in this world and is perfected in the world to come.

Jesus is calling us to share his own passion for God.

He wants us to light a fire that will burn in our hearts just like it did in his.

He is asking us not just to praise him and adore him and worship him, but most importantly of all—to follow him.

Do as he did. Love what he loved. Be committed to what he was committed to: selfless service and genuine compassion.

Admittedly, that will not be easy. It will involve stretching us, pulling us out of our small selves, introducing us to something bigger and richer and fuller. It will involve taking us to a whole new level of living—even to one where the water of baptism is thicker even than blood.