

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 13th Sunday Ordinary Year C1

I think we all know what a person is talking about when we hear them say, ***“There is one in every group!”*** They are talking about the ‘live wire’ person waiting to arc at a moment’s notice. Or maybe because next weekend is 4th of July, we could say they are referring to the ***‘firecracker’*** in every group & in every family. That’s the person you can count on to bring the charge to each gathering, as in ‘Oh, look out, James is here!’ I think of that when I hear Jesus calm down James & John in today’s gospel. It sounds like Jesus has ‘two’ of these firecrackers, a ‘dynamic duo’ that is ready to rumble at any time. Our gospel tells that James and John feel slighted by a Samaritan village’s rejection of Jesus (*doesn’t that show how thin-skinned their egos are that it is not even them being rejected---Jesus is the one rejected!*) After this, they ask Jesus about calling down a rain of fire-lightning upon the village. James & John here, I imagine to be like the guys in the group most likely to say those famous last words, “Hey you all, watch this.....”

But further about James and John, keep in mind that Jesus gave them a nickname of “Sons of Thunder”(Mark 3:17), as if to say ‘you will know when they are around—you’ll hear them’ (that phrase in Greek is a nice way of saying, ‘rowdy boys’). I suggest that this little fiery fit of them, issuing a vendetta against the Samaritan village, that this is where their name comes from. James & John have a history of this. Consider that these are the same two men who aside push the other apostles and claim the seats of glory from Jesus ‘one on your left, the other on your right’ in His kingdom (Mark 10:37). Also, this same John here later wants to shut down and pull the card of an unknown exorcist in Luke 9:49, when John tells Jesus, *“Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us.”* Probably not by chance also, but this James is the first apostle to be martyred, (Acts 12:1-2). Maybe I’m too speculative, but I’m *‘just saying’* there may be something about his temperament that put him out front on King Herod’s radar, making him the first apostle in Herod’s line of fire! But, more important than this ‘hotheadedness’ of James and John is the fact that Jesus ‘rebukes’ (strong word) them. *‘No’, Jesus says, ‘we have no time for such vengeance or wasting our energy consumed with anger & bitterness. Move on, let it go-there is too much good to be done to be caught up settling scores’.* I like how Jesus earlier had given the apostles a very specific mission command in Luke 9:5, saying, “If anyone does not welcome you, shake the dust from your feet and go to next town...” James & John missed that, and leave the lane, shooting off track here And that introduces a common theme from beginning to end for today’s gospel. A lot of people think we have three disjointed episodes in this one reading: 1) first about Jesus being so resolute & fixing His GPS course setting for Jerusalem, then 2) this James/John flare-up episode, and then 3) the introduction of several ‘conditional’ disciples who all say “Yes, I’ll follow you Jesus, ***but...***” What I find runs through all three of these

episodes as a common theme is the 'complete' mission-minded focus that Jesus calls for in His followers. Jesus calls us to set our sight on witnessing to the Kingdom of God, and letting nothing distract us from that aim. We can imagine what Jesus senses in a half-hearted disciple who says, "I want to follow you Jesus, but first I have to clean up my garage." We know where that goes: I start with the garage and then discover that unfinished desk that needs restoring (take care of that) and then I find the angle grinder I borrowed from Jimmy that needs returning, and so on and so on. I won't be showing up at Jesus' roll-call, because I'm off-track in those other tasks. So Jesus says, "Once you put your hand to the plow, no turning back." Certainly such looking away, or looking behind, pulls you out of the row and on another course. I sure learned once how quick a sign on side of road will jump out in front of you when you reach into back seat for a CD case. So, Jesus calls for complete and focused mission determination. While James and John think they are following him, Jesus points out to them that their emotional baggage, entangled with issues of nursing a grudge, & babying their bitterness, that is diverting them from the direction of His mission. Jesus says He needs all energy directed toward the Kingdom. We shouldn't drag in our own conditions for following Jesus. Simply get on with the task of announcing the kingdom-keep moving, make ground, hold it, and advance always forward, keeping focused completely on Jesus.

Yet, I know some people hear the cases of those 'would-be' disciples, and feel torn by what seem 'legitimate conditions' to bring in some of their personal wishes. But Jesus would say, "No-leave it all-come follow me". But, doesn't it pull at our hearts to hear, *'I need to go bury my father' & 'let me first say goodbye to family one last time'*. What happened to 'family friendliness', or the commandment 'Honor father/mother', or even our corporal work of mercy to 'Bury the Dead'. How does Jesus justify walking away from such honorable obligations. But I quickly interject and stop us there and say, "For most leaders maybe that is a case to put a condition on following them. But we have to ***keep in mind who we are dealing with, Jesus the Savior, the Master Good Shepherd.***" Jesus knows about our obligations, our thoughts & our heart's concerns. He knows the good that needs doing. But He wants us to trust Him first. Follow Him and Trust. He is going to take care of any burial, & he will give opportunity to meet our familial obligations. For example, when I truly realize who it is that I am following (who I am getting behind), then shouldn't I count on Him providing a way for both. For example consider how these cases could work out just fine if I go ahead and follow Jesus first. With the deceased father case, Jesus could say 'Follow me unreservedly and guess what, no burial is needed, let's go together and raise your dad from the dead like Lazarus'; or take the other case suggested to postpone accepting the mission, about going back to say farewell to family. This 'would-be' disciple doesn't know but this family may already be up the road advancing ahead of him with Jesus' mission and they

are waiting on his acceptance and coming forward to catch up with them, or perhaps that by going on ahead with Jesus now, Jesus' itinerary is going to pass straight through their farm already so that Jesus planned to 'team up' with them anyway later. So, while we want to throw up conditions or excuses to delay or turn down discipleship with Jesus, we have to remember first who it is that is calling us. Jesus: He knows us, *(again with such family cases, Jesus could say, "Yes, I know your deceased father too, I, God, the Father and I, created Him.....we know his need)* Again, we have to assure ourselves, that Jesus is pure goodness itself, and He will not only take care of us but He will show the way for all of our duties to be covered too, by us or by someone else, but still, He will cover them. He knows all that is good, and what needs doing. He will provide the way, making sure all good responsibilities/obligations are taken care of. But we have to accept and trust along the way. He calls us to follow Him without excuses, 'No, 'yes I will, but first I have to....' Again, we need only remember who it is calling us. It is Jesus, the one who saves, the one who knows us. So, that when He calls, He looks for our yes and our immediate following. We say yes, and He will provide the way!