

# THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 1, 2007

*1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21; Ps. 16:1-11; Gal. 5:1, 13-18; Luke 9:51-62*

Reflection by *S. Noreen Coleman, O.P.*

*"I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden. Along with the sunshine, there's gotta be a little rain sometimes."* The lyrics of this popular seventies song might well come to mind as we turn to the three "conversations" cited in today's Gospel.

But first, let us observe Jesus who is "resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem..." (vs. 51), or, as the Challoner-Rheims version puts it, who has "steadfastly set his face..." His eyes behold the wood of the cross on which he is to suffer and die. His ears become bombarded with the jeers of the chaotic crowd. His lips ready themselves to give expression to his heart's deepest pain: sadness and utter aloneness as he finds himself rejected by his friends and seemingly abandoned by his Father. Why, then, is he so determined to make this journey? Because, Good Shepherd that he is, he is compelled to "lay down his life for his sheep" (*Jn. 10:11*).

Now come the three encounters. Someone from the crowd volunteers to follow Jesus "wherever..." (vs. 58). We have the sense that Jesus looks directly into this person's heart and sees the inner conflict described by Paul in today's second reading: "...the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want" (vs. 17). Does Jesus know, as in the story of the rich young man, that he has painted a picture no comfort-loving person would relish embracing?

In the second, one of those present receives a personal invitation to follow Jesus, who again presents a troubling challenge: Leave behind the culture of death, darkness, lifelessness and take me up on my offer of the only way that leads to life.

Not to be outdone, another approaches Jesus with a generous offer to follow him. However, he will tag along only when he is good and ready to cut the apron strings. How deflated he must be when Jesus refuses to accept his perfectly legitimate excuse to delay his discipleship.

Were these three—are we—willing to walk in the footsteps of Jesus who faced his destiny head on? If we would be his followers, we are told, we must "renounce ourselves and take up our cross daily" (*Lk. 9:23*). We must be willing to "lay down our life for our friends" (*Jn. 15:13*), who are his friends—the poor, the lonely, the marginalized, the forgotten... Then, "...anyone who loses his life for my sake... will save it" (*Lk. 9:24*).

No, Jesus doesn't promise a rose garden to any of his disciples. Yet, as we proclaim today the words of the responsorial psalm, "*You ... show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever*" (vs. 11), perhaps we have already reclaimed that magnificent garden vacated long ago by our first parents!