



13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ***YEAR A – July 2, 2017***

The first reading today is taken from the second book of Kings in chapter 4. The prophet Elisha was the successor of Elijah in the office of prophet in Israel. His ministry lasted 60 years in the 9th century BC. It was during his ministry that the worship of Baal was eradicated. In the first reading, today we hear how Elisha helped a woman in need after she showed him the kindness of hospitality. The story has a happy ending but not every story does.

The responsorial psalm today provides the transition. Many psalms begin with complaint and end with joy and praise. But this psalm (89) begins with God's favors and ends with the cross of grievance. The psalm was written at a time when the house of David was in peril. Some think it was penned in the time of the Babylonian Captivity. That was a time of slavery for the people of God and a heavy cross for them to bear.

600 years later, Jesus says in the Gospel, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me." Taking up your cross and following Jesus is not easy.

It's hard for a young woman to pick up her cross and follow Jesus after being abused and rejected by someone she deeply loved. It's hard for an old man to pick up his cross and follow Jesus after he has been forcefully placed in a nursing home. It's hard for a wife to pick up her cross and follow Jesus when her husband spends his nights away from her and the children. It's hard for a young man to pick up his cross and follow Jesus after a drunk driver has doomed him to spend the rest of his life in a wheel chair.



That raises an important question. Why is it that some people can take up their cross and follow Jesus while others cannot.

Victor Frankl addresses that question in his best-selling book, "Man's Search for Meaning". It's a book worth reading. Frankl was a prisoner in a German concentration camp in the second world war. He witnessed and experienced man's inhumanity to man and saw how it changed some prisoners into animals and others into saints. Frankl says the deciding difference was faith. Their faith put them in touch with a power that helped them maintain their humanity in the face of brutal inhumanity. In addition to their strong faith in God, they also knew how to love.

In 53 years as a priest, I have seen people suffer in many different ways. Those who claim to have faith but have no love, seem to be self-centered, selfish folks who expect others to wait on them hand and foot. While those who have love but no faith are usually self-less people, but they suffer needlessly too. Without faith, there is no hope and without hope, the cross they carry gets harder to bear.



People who have faith, hope and love are people who know what Jesus asks can be done. "Take up your cross and follow me." The love we need to do that is the love that Jesus had when he was here on earth. It is the love he has for us even now. It is selfless love. It is the only way to carry a "cross".

Everybody has one. How are you doing with yours?