

# 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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Last week St Paul spoke to us about Original Sin, and its effects on us. In today's second reading he tells us just how God's gift of grace more than makes up for this. Christ our Lord takes us up in his loving act of self-sacrifice on the cross. Through the cleansing waters of baptism, we enter the tomb with him. Original sin and all personal sins are washed away. We are drowned to a way of life without God, and reborn to a new life of grace. We share in the risen life of Jesus, both now and forever. Our earthly bodies must die one day, but we will live forever with Our Lord and the saints in heaven. Grace frees us from sin and death.

Original Sin had consequences for us. So does the gift of grace. We must live now in a new way, dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is why in the Gospel Our Lord promises a reward to those who welcome the disciples, and show kindness towards them because of who they are. "Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me." As long as we are in a state of grace Christ lives in us, and in a way that other people can recognise and appreciate, even though they might not at that point understand whom they are encountering.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells the disciples that he expects two qualities to distinguish them: constancy and kindness. They must not be ditherers, afraid to stand by what they believe, or seeking to please everyone they meet. They must not put ties of blood or friendship ahead of the truth and their relationship with him. At the same time they will gain a reward, and win people over by kindness. Those who meet them will be blessed through that meeting, just as the woman of Shunem would be blessed by her meeting with Elisha. She recognised something special about him, although she did not share his Faith – "He must be a holy man of God." – and went so far as to build a roof extension for him to stay in. Her act of kindness brought an equally warm response. Elisha promises her the child for which she longs.

St Augustine tells us a similar story about his own conversion. Meeting St Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, had a profound influence on him. We should remember that Ambrose was no 'wimp'. In a time of conflict over religion, he organised all-night sit-ins to prevent his church being taken over by the followers of Arius, and in doing so gave us the foundations for the divine office, reciting the 150 psalms, filling the day with prayer. He excommunicated the Roman Emperor for massacring several thousand political opponents, and allowed him to receive Holy Communion only after he had done public penance on the steps of the Cathedral. Augustine went to listen to him only because he was an acclaimed public speaker, to learn from his style. "Unknown to me, it was you who led me to him, so that I might knowingly be led by him to you. This man of God received me like a father and, as bishop, told me how glad he was that I had come. My heart warmed to him, not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I had quite despaired of finding in your Church, but simply as a man who showed me kindness...Although I did not trouble to take what Ambrose said to heart, but only to listen to the manner in which he said it...nevertheless his meaning, which I tried to ignore, found its way into my mind together with his words...I also began to sense the truth of what he said, though only gradually." It was this constancy in belief and behaviour combined with kindness that opened Augustine's heart. May others find the same in us!