

**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
(June 27, 2010)**

Writing in *America* magazine this week, scripture scholar Barbara Reid begins her commentary on today's Gospel by recalling the following incident:

The threats from the loggers and their hired gunmen were coming more frequently. Some urged her to leave or to desist her relentless outcry against the devastation of the Brazilian rainforest. But Dorothy Stang, SND, would not leave the poor farmers whose homes and livelihood were in peril. She forged her way through almost impassable muddy roads to reach them, to read the Scriptures and pray together, to bolster their courage to stand up against injustice, and to urge them to live in harmony with the rainforest, with God, and with one another. Her resolute journey ended when she was gunned down on February 12, 2005.

In today's Gospel we see the same resolute determination on the part of Jesus not to deviate from the path on which he has set out, even though for him that path will also lead to death. It's also a story about commitment, commitment to a cause, to discipleship, and about the costs involved in that commitment.

As Luke tells it, Jesus is on a journey. Every journey, no matter how well planned or how well known the destination, still has a measure of the unknown. This was true of Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Luke has that marvelous way of putting it: "He firmly resolved to proceed towards Jerusalem." The Greek says, "He set his face firmly." Set his face firmly. I get the picture of someone moving resolutely, not letting anything get in the way. It all speaks that one word: commitment. In the face of the unknown, Jesus never wavered.

Our age seems to have trouble with commitments – at least long term ones. Priests and religious who have vowed their lives to the service of God and others sometimes have trouble living up to that commitment. Marriage, we say, is for life, and every married couple agrees to that on their wedding day. Yet we know that over half the marriages in this country, including Catholics, will not last. Now, mind you, I'm not judging anyone. God leads different people down different paths, and I'm

beginning to think there is such a thing as a temporary vocation to one or another way of life. And in the light of this Gospel I am simply noting the difficulty there is in setting our faces firmly in a particular direction. Jesus warns about this. That's what those strange sayings mean when he says, "Let the dead bury their dead," and "Don't look back once you have decided to follow me." I can't imagine him meaning that we should not respect our parents. This is simply a Semitic way, very concrete, of stating an abstract principle: nothing is more important than responding to the call to follow Jesus.

To opt for God in our life is a very important choice. Isn't it reassuring when we see people who have remained strong and firm in their Christian commitment, whether it's to God, to another person, or to some enterprise on behalf of other people? I think we need this witness to stability today, and when we find it it's a great inspiration. I recently helped a couple celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. What a beautiful thing, still in love, still loving after fifty years. At the reception after the Mass at which they renewed their wedding vows, I said to them, "You know, given the kind of life I've chosen I can't imagine living with the same person for fifty years." They looked at me and they said almost in unison, "Father, it ain't easy."

To opt for the Spirit means to strive continually to move towards the Lord's goals, and, insofar as possible, to make our decisions according to the Spirit's directives. It's not always easy, perhaps it is even frequently difficult. We won't always succeed. Maybe we'll stumble along that path, perhaps even fall. But that doesn't end the game or even retire the side. Jesus is always there, with the Father and the Spirit, waiting to pick us up and help us on the way. With the willingness to build on what has been started, the journey continues. Let's pray that we will all set our faces firmly towards the goal.

We are privileged today to welcome two new members to our family here at Holy Trinity and to the larger church, the Body of Christ. Their parents and godparents will make a commitment for them to undertake the same journey that we all follow in following Jesus. We pray for them that as they grow older and come to understand what it is we do for them today they will with the grace of God set their faces firmly towards the goal.