

A sermon by Canon Maggie Guite

July 31st 2011 Proper 13 A

Romans 9.1-5 Matthew 14.13-21

Sermon for an adult baptism

It's a wonderful thing when we're able to baptise an adult in our midst – not something that happens too often, but something that can have a special meaning for us all.

When we hear an adult profess his decision for Christ it reminds us that none of us is a Christian by accident or force of circumstances: it's something we have to decide for ourselves. Many of us may have been baptized as infants, and brought up within Christian families; some of us may never be able to remember a particular moment when we chose the Christian way above other paths. But if we are Christians, we are so, because we are choosing it every day. *'I turn to Christ'* is a decision we make by praying, by belonging, by believing; it's a choice we make in our hope of becoming more like him and in being

penitent when we fail. It's a choice we make in turning, and re-turning, to go his way in all sorts of daily decisions.

We know there are many things which militate against this choice for Christ in our lives. We could all make a list of temptations, sins and personal weaknesses which threaten to take us in other directions. But we should also remember that it can sometimes be things which are good in themselves which can seem more important than our discipleship, and so can pull us off course.

Among the chief goods in a human life is the gift of family (that is, when a family is not so utterly dysfunctional as to be damaging, and not a good thing at all). For most of us, happily, family is probably something to be thankful for. But we have to recognise, nevertheless, that if it threatens to stand in the way of following Jesus, then Jesus has the priority. We have to learn from him how best to love our families, not set him aside in favour their idea of the best way of loving them.

In our first reading we were let into a little glimpse of how St Paul felt about the family, the race, the

kindred, he had in some sense left behind when he answered the call of Christ. He still loved them with an agonising love, and wrestled with the question of how they related to God, since they hadn't accepted the grace of the Gospel. Our passage today was just the first tiny section of nearly three chapters in Romans, in which he struggles with this question: in the end, he has to leave the status and fate of his kindred in the hands of God's providence, with a paradoxical trust... We can all learn something from that...

But, if our first lesson gave us a little taste of some of the anguish that can be involved in making the choice for Christ - separating oneself from the beliefs and priorities of loved-ones - our second reading gave us a picture of the joys we find in turning to Christ. In him we come to one who's always moved to compassion by our needs, who brings us healing, and who won't turn away hungry those who come to him. And, in the company of Christ, we find ourselves also in the company of a huge multitude of his followers, our worldwide spiritual family.

Pri has been believing and worshipping as a follower of Christ for many years; today he comes to join the family in a definitive way. And, on behalf of that Christian family throughout the world, it's our privilege here at St Mark's to give him a welcome and assure him of our prayers.