

A reading from the second book of Kings.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

One day Elisha was passing through Shunem,  
 where a wealthy woman lived,  
 who urged him to have a meal.  
 So whenever he passed that way,  
 he would stop there for a meal.  
 She said to her husband,  
 “Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way  
 is a holy man of God.  
 Let us make a small roof chamber with walls,  
 and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp,  
 so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”  
 One day when Elisha came there,  
 he went up to the chamber and lay down there.  
 He said to his servant Gehazi,  
 “What then may be done for the woman?”  
 Gehazi answered,  
 “Well, she has no son, and her husband is old.”  
 Elisha said, “Call her.”  
 When the servant had called her, she stood at the door.  
 Elisha said,  
 “At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son.”

Shunem = SHOO-nem

Elisha = ih-LIGH-shuh

Gehazi = gih-HAY-zigh

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
 then look up at the people  
 and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – A 13

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus  
were baptized into his death.

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death,  
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
so we too might walk in newness of life.

But if we have died with Christ,  
we believe that we will also live with him.

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead,  
will never die again;

death no longer has dominion over him.

The death he died, he died to sin, once for all;  
but the life he lives, he lives to God.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin  
and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A 13

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

Jesus said to his Apostles:

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me  
is not worthy of me;  
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me  
is not worthy of me;  
and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me  
is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds their life will lose it,  
and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,  
and whoever welcomes me  
welcomes the one who sent me.

Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet  
will receive a prophet’s reward;

and whoever welcomes a righteous person  
in the name of a righteous person  
will receive the reward of the righteous;

and whoever gives even a cup of cold water  
to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple –  
truly I tell you –  
that person will not lose their reward.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

The provision of hospitality by the Shunammite woman for the prophet Elisha is one of the more engaging episodes of the Old Testament. The caption to the reading fails to indicate the evident reason for its selection this Sunday. Clearly it was chosen because it illustrates the dominical saying in the gospel: “He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.”

What the historian of the Book of Kings means when he speaks of a “holy man of God” is shown by the other woman's reaction to Elisha's predecessor, Elijah, after he had restored her son to life: “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (1 Kgs 17:24).

In other words, to be a holy man of God in the Old Testament does not signalize mystical achievement but means to be the bearer of God's word—a word that is “truth,” that is, not that it passes the test of doctrinal orthodoxy, but that it effects what it says on the plane of history. Similarly, Elisha is a holy man of God, not because of the achievements of his piety, but because he, like his predecessor, was entrusted to proclaim to his generation the effective word of Yhwh.

### Responsorial Psalm: 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19

These verses come from one of the great messianic psalms of the Old Testament that portray the coming of the ideal Davidic king. Understandably, it is a psalm that Christian tradition has associated with the Christmas season. It provided the offertory for the third Mass of Christmas in the Roman Missal, and it has always been the proper psalm at one of the offices of Christmas Day in the Book of Common Prayer.

The last stanza alludes to the messianic king. But this aspect is not stressed today. It is simply a hymn of praise for the steadfast love and faithfulness (chesed w'neth, very important Hebrew words characterizing Yhwh's being and actions). No doubt the Shunammite woman regarded the visits of Elisha to her home as signs of Yhwh's steadfast love and faithfulness.

### Reading II: Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

This passage is used in full at the Easter Vigil. While the references to the Christian's dying with Christ are all in the past tense, the references to resurrection are future and conditional. The new life in Christ is something that has to be constantly implemented. The Christian life means more than aspiring after an elusive ideal does. What happened to us in baptism cannot be made to “unhappen,” however often we stumble and fall. The reality of baptism is always there. Luther, when he was tempted to despair of his faith, used

to repeat “*Baptizatus sum.*” That is something we, too, can always draw upon. So the Christian life is fitting oneself into that which we have already been made by baptism: “*Werde das, was du bist*” (Become what you are!).

### **Gospel: Matthew 10:37-42**

This is the last instalment of the Matthean missionary charge to the Twelve. It embraces three complexes of material: the warning that discipleship may involve the breaking of family ties; the saying about taking up the cross; a group of three sayings about the reception given to messengers.

The first two clearly go together. Both concern the cost of discipleship. They appear in various contexts in the gospel tradition, and only in this passage as part of a missionary charge. The first saying in the third group is found in both Matthew and Luke (in a different context in Luke); the second is peculiar to Matthew; the third is found also in Mark.

The fact that the second saying (about receiving a prophet, Mt 10:41) governs the choice of the first reading suggests that this is the saying to which we should pay particular attention today. It is a challenge to those who hear the message of the envoys to receive them properly, not for the sake of their persons, but because they are the bearers of the divine message.

What this passage has in mind may be illustrated from the words that Paul used when speaking of his reception by the Thessalonians: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13).

Reginald H. Fuller