

XXIII Sunday (Sept 5th) Homily on Lk: 25- 33

Each fall, a lot of young boys aspire to become football players. But only a few will find their way onto the high school or university teams. Every year a coach challenges the hopefuls explaining the cost involved: "Your muscles will ache from calisthenics. We'll run you till you think you can run no more. We will drill you and drill you, then drill you again, every day, after school. There'll be no drugs, no alcohol. Only if you work hard will you make the team. If you don't, you won't." The personal, economic, and emotional cost of becoming an Olympic or professional athlete is still higher. Young children spend hours a day practicing their skills and submitting themselves to rigorous programs of diet and exercise to become great gymnasts or dancers. Others accept the cost of dedicating years to study and hard work to become outstanding doctors or lawyers or scientists or writers. In today's gospel, Jesus challenges his would-be followers to calculate the cost in following him, because they will have to leave their families and possessions and accept the pain and suffering involved in following him as true disciples.

Today's readings challenge us to total commitment to the will of God, putting God first in our lives. Today's gospel reminds us to count the cost of being a Christian, because the cost is high. Christian discipleship requires one to "renounce" both possessions of the earth and possessions of the heart (i.e., one's relationships). In Luke's gospel, Jesus lays out four "trip wires" for true Christian discipleship: i) Renouncing the attachment to family by putting God first, before other relationships and self-interest. ii) Severing the attachment to possessions by leading a detached life, willingly sharing our blessings with others. iii) Accepting the hard consequences of discipleship which involves daily sacrificial service done to others and even losing one's life for them. We must also be faithful in our stewardship, faithful in our worship attendance, faithful in our sexuality, honest in our business practices, accurate on our tax returns, and we must show compassion for the less fortunate iv) Calculating the cost involved. Using the two parables of the tower-builder and the king defending his country, Jesus says: think long and hard about Christian discipleship before a decision is made.

Matthew's gospel makes it clear. *"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."* (Mt 10:37-38). When Jesus said "hate your family," he was talking about spiritual detachment, the ability to put God first, before other relationships and before self-interest. Without such detachment, one does not have the ability to truly follow Jesus.

Jesus does not want a large number of "half-way" disciples who are willing to do a "little bit" of prayer, a "little bit" of commitment, a "little bit" of dedication, a "little bit" of love. Jesus wants disciples who are truly committed to prayer, to discipleship and to being ruled by him as their king. With a few such dedicated disciples, Jesus could change the world. With God's grace everything is possible.

JOKE OF THE WEEK: President in search of a true Christian disciple: Abraham Lincoln was debating whom to hire as Indian Commissioner. He called his advisors Ben Wade and Senator Daniel Voorhees for assistance in selecting the right man. "Gentlemen," said President Lincoln, "I want an honest, decent, caring, moral Christian man, a man frugal and self-sacrificing!" "Mr. President, I feel certain you won't find him," said Voorhees. "And why not?" asked the President. "Because he was Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified eighteen hundred years ago," said the Senator.

Additional anecdotes

1) **Narrow gate golf & basketball:** Arnold Palmer, for many years, was one of America's finest golfers. Certainly he was our most popular golfer. Wouldn't it be great to be a "natural" athlete like Arnold Palmer? Except that Arnold Palmer practiced golf eight hours a day, day after day after day. Being a great golfer requires commitment. Some of you who play the game are thinking to yourselves that even being a poor golfer requires commitment. You don't excel in athletics or anything else unless you are willing to pay the price. Larry Bird won the Most Valuable Player award in the National Basketball League for three years in a row. How did he achieve such excellence? Larry Bird is legendary for his dedication to the game of basketball. An opposing player tells of arriving at Boston Garden with his teammates to play the Boston Celtics several hours before an

important game. There was the great Larry Bird standing at the foul line of dark, deserted Boston Garden practicing free throws over and over again.. That's true in athletics. It is also true in business. Jesus says in today's gospel that it is true in our relationship with God.

2: "The beauty remains; the pain passes." During the last several years of his life, the famous French artist, Auguste Renoir, was virtually crippled by arthritis. But he continued to paint every day. His wife Alice had to insert the paintbrush between his fingers in order for him to continue his work. One day his close friend, the famous artist Henri Matisse, watching Auguste paint while he suffered excruciating pain at each colorful stroke, asked him, "Auguste, why do you continue to paint when you are in such agony?" Auguste Renoir's response was immediate, "The beauty remains; the pain passes." Passion for his art empowered Renoir to paint until the day he died. Those who continue to admire the enduring beauty of his smiling portraits, his landscapes, his still-life studies of flowers and fruit will find no trace therein of the pain required to create them. Most will agree that the *cost* was worth it. In today's gospel Jesus tells us that following him as a true disciple is costly, but the reward is worth the suffering involved.