

HOMILY SUNDAY 23-C
“The Cost of Discipleship”

(Wisdom 9:13-18; Psalm 90; Philemon 9b-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33)

Are you a tourist, or disciple? Travelling with the crowd, or following Jesus?

Take up your cross, and follow Jesus as a disciple.

Today’s gospel dynamics are very interesting. A crowd is travelling with Jesus. He turns and confronts them with a choice – do they just want to travel with him, or make a commitment to follow him by taking up a cross?

I am reminded of a man who went on a pilgrimage to a shrine in Europe. Shortly after he returned from the pilgrimage, he physically abused his wife on at least one occasion. I was shocked to hear of that and suspect that he went to Europe as a tourist rather than a pilgrim. That is the choice Jesus puts before us today – to be either a tourist, travelling with him to satisfy our curiosity, or to be a committed follower, ready to accept whatever comes out of loyalty to him.

There are actually two invitations in the gospel: to let go and to pick up. We are asked to let go of inordinate attachment to our possessions, including attachments to relationships, and then take up a cross.

With regard to “letting go,” John O’Shea has an interesting insight into the nature of “possessions.” For him, possessions are whatever we hold onto that competes with our communion with Jesus and cooperation with his mission. They are substitute absolutes. It is not just a matter of freeing ourselves from material holdings or social positions – an outer-world dispossession. It is also a matter of purging our mind of its security fantasies and its habits of violent domination – an inner-world dispossession. An essential step of discipleship is selling what we have that keeps us from integrating the mind and actions of Christ into our minds and actions.

Letting go means to die to false gods we have turned to and chosen in our lives. These false gods could be our sins, or wealth, our addictions, or our defects of character such as resentments and human insecurities. At one point in my life, following Jesus more closely meant letting go of some of my stubborn pride that I became aware of through the honest feedback of a friend.

Letting go is accompanied by taking up a cross. If Jesus is the disciples’ center, then the cross is their way. The cross is the symbol of leading a persistent and peaceful life in a violent world. This is not a life of avoiding difficulties; it is a life of stepping on the snake and the scorpion (Lk 10:19). They are to move into those places where no semblance of kingdom living can be found and bring the kingdom possibility. To follow Jesus is to use him as a rock to stand on and then put their shoulder to the wheel of the world. When the world refuses to move, the disciples receive its stubborn refusal into their bodies, as did Jesus. Carrying the cross means taking on the healing of the earth in the most radical way. This following of Jesus should not be mindless. The disciples are to think about what it entails. A decision should be made with all the practical wisdom of a cost-conscious builder and a battle-hardened king.

We tend to think of the cross as being an inconvenience or hindrance of some kind. I would like to suggest that the cross could be the challenge to relate more closely to family and friends, to spend more time with them, as well as to forgive those who have hurt us and move towards reconciliation. These two areas of life present a great challenge to all of us in our busy schedules.

For parents and grand-parents to take time to be with their children, to try to answer their emotional needs, to listen to them and soak up their feelings, to bless them and speak well of them, to discipline them with love and guide them, to accept them as they are but also help them become all that they can be – what a beautiful cross for parents and grand-parents.

For religious, political and civil leaders, to try to be as honest as one can, to do one's duty to the best of one's ability, to be transparent and accountable in all things, to balance the demands of family and work – what a beautiful cross for leaders of all kinds.

For all of us, to be less sensitive to hurt and to be more resilient in dealing with the hurts that inevitably come our way; to let go of nursing our resentments and rather to move towards forgiveness by expressing our feelings of hurt with love towards those who have hurt us in any way – what a powerful cross to pick up and live in our daily lives.

It is interesting that Steps 8 & 9 of the Twelve Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous focus on making amends for any harm that we may have done. That too might be another cross that we could pick up and that would make a big difference in our lives.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is not only a participation in the healing love and forgiveness of Jesus made present to us through Word and Sacrament. It is also a commitment to follow Jesus on the road into the kingdom, by letting go of our negative attitudes and hurtful behaviour, and by picking up whatever cross fits into our lives on a daily basis.

So, have faith, let go, take up your cross, and follow Jesus into the kingdom.

Here are some questions for us to ponder in the light of the gospel today:

1. To what am I clinging in this life that prevents me from really following Jesus. What must I let go of?
2. What is my cross? What cross is Jesus offering me, asking me to carry?