

Twenty-third Sunday of the Year

The world is full of wishful thinkers who dream and talk but never succeed because they are unprepared to try. While addressing a large crowd who are eager to be his disciples, Jesus bluntly dampens their enthusiasm by challenging them in a way that is off-putting.

He's not interested in gaining a large following by softening his words and watering down the requirements needed, so he leaves his listeners under no illusion about the cost of discipleship. Nothing short of total commitment, even life itself, is required. In fact, what he's saying is this: 'If you want to be disciples of mine, you've got to think seriously. Don't act on the spur of the moment or on impulse because it's not for the starry-eyed. Consider what it's going to cost because I have no time for half-hearted recruits. I'm not inviting you to walk in my footsteps for a day, a month or even a year but for a lifetime. What's more I'm looking for followers who will measure up to my expectations.'

The gospel presents us with a series of sayings on what the demand of discipleship involves in terms of suffering and self-sacrifice. The life to lead and the conditions laid down are anything but easy: you give God everything and hold nothing back. Wholehearted service is demanded and there's no room for compromise.

The price to be paid is the heavy burden of carrying the cross, and it may mean the parting of company with close friends. The journey to God is so valuable that it is worth stripping our lifestyles down to the basics. By doing this we realise that discipleship is more important than acquiring possessions.

This gospel makes us feel uncomfortable because our lives should demonstrate that we are carrying the cross. When the cross is absent from our lives then Christ is not present either. Putting God first in our lives is a choice we must make every day. We can hardly consider ourselves as feeling the pinch and standing up for what we believe if all we have got to show is Sunday Mass with communion and a few prayers hastily said. At moments when the struggle becomes too great, it's good to remember that we are not alone; Christ is walking along every step of the road with us. We are called to be disciples at home, in the family, in our place of work, in our dealings with our neighbour, treating them all as our friends and appreciating their true worth. To follow Christ through time into eternity costs nothing less than everything.

Prayer of the Faithful

PRIEST. We pray to God the Father, who welcomes us as his own children for the strength to meet the demands which genuine Christianity places upon us.

READER

1. We pray for those who lead the church of God that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit in the decisions they make to build a better world. **Lord, hear us.**

2. We pray for ourselves, that we may not turn our back on suffering but may accept the crosses that come our way. **Lord, hear us.**

3. That we may realise that a life dedicated to God entails a life of suffering service. **Lord, hear us.**

4. We pray for the sick and the neglected, that they may have the courage to persevere in their sufferings. **Lord, hear us.**

5. We pray for our deceased relatives and friends who have shouldered Christ's cross in this world. May they now enjoy eternal happiness in heaven. **Lord, hear us.**

Let us now join our prayers with those of Mary, our Mother, as we say...**HAIL MARY...**

In a few moments of silence, let us bring our own prayers to God our Father.

PRIEST. God our Father, you know the many different needs we have in this life. Give us the courage to take up our cross and follow in the footsteps of your Son Jesus. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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