

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 7, 2025 (Sunday)

St. Edward's Parish

Friends, the Gospel today contains one of Our Lord's most challenging statements: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate their father and mother, spouse and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even their life itself, cannot be my disciple." We might ask ourselves, "wait a minute... doesn't God tell us to honour our father and mother? What does Jesus mean by hating our family and life itself?"

This is not a matter of hating our mother and father in the typical emotional sense, as if we must despise them. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus saying this in a way that is easier for us to understand: "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 (Mt. 10:37)" Hatred means, therefore, a radical choice to disfavour everyone and everything compared to Jesus. There must be nothing that takes priority over our love for Jesus, not our family, our possessions, or even our very life.

Jesus lays down a basic fact that if anything takes priority over Him, we simply cannot be His disciple. It's not so much that He does not want us, but that we will not be able to follow Him. If a boat remains tied to a wharf, it will never be able to depart for sea. The attachment makes it impossible. So it is with us, if we are attached to anything more strongly than Jesus, we simply won't be able to truly follow Him.

Notice how Jesus is not afraid of making serious demand upon those who approach Him. The opening of today's Gospel says that large crowds were travelling with Jesus. Just when everything is going well, He turns and makes this most shocking demand. Sometimes in the Church we are tempted to never challenge each other, we want to be welcoming and hospitable (and those are good things). However, Jesus never backs down from testing how sincere we really are. Of all those who followed Him, how many were really willing to choose Him above all else? Being in the crowd is not enough to make a disciple. Similarly, sitting in the pew is not enough to make a Catholic just as sitting on a boat doesn't make a fisherman.

There is a radical choice at the heart of our faith that faces each of us. And this will invariably involve some sacrifice or burden. Therefore, Jesus says, "whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." To illustrate this, He gives two examples: one of a man planning to build a tower, the other of a king going out to war. Each of them must weigh the matter carefully to decide if they are able and willing to see this decision to the end. If we want to really be Christians, then we must think hard about the commitment. It is a decision that will cost us something. Has there been a time in your life when your commitment to Jesus really cost you something?

We face many situations where we will be challenged to put our faith in Jesus first. For example, to keep the Lord's Day holy and attend Sunday Mass; to forgive others and love our enemies; to risk losing friends who do not agree with our faith; to speak up in defense of human life or the truths of marriage; to be generous in having children; to learn our faith and be consistent in prayer. Just a few decades ago we lived in a largely Christian culture. While that was a very good thing, it was also easy to float along with the crowd and never make a firm personal decision for our faith. Now we

live in a culture that is increasingly hostile towards basic Christian faith. This is a time when those who do chose to practice the faith and come to Church will have to make a more serious decision and sacrifice. This may mean fewer people in the pews; however, I expect that those who do come will be more deeply committed. That depth of commitment will be a powerful and attractive witness of faith to the society around us.

Our Lord longs for us to make this kind of radical choice to follow Him, and He desires to help us. Let us ask for the grace this week to choose Jesus and to be willing to suffer any trial to follow Him. We can also turn to the Virgin Mary to help us and show the way; she gave everything for her Son, Jesus, and she was the first and most perfect disciple.