

September 8, 2019

Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Sometimes family conflicts can be highly emotional. I remember some years ago when my sister-in-law was disciplining my niece, who at the time was about 15 years old. Like many teenagers, she was pushing on the boundaries that her parents had set for her. She got to the point where she could not contain her anger and she blurted out to her mother, "I hate you!" Of course, she did not really hate her mother. Things are now entirely different now that my niece is also a wife and mother. I find that the more I grow in age, the more I appreciate the struggle that my parents had in raising us six kids. Life is not easy!

Jesus makes very clear to us in the 14th chapter of Luke's gospel that following him will be no easy task. Today's passage begins with "Great crowds were following Jesus" and we could imagine that not everyone had truly made a firm commitment to follow him. Some were probably wondering if they could see him do some miraculous healing, other curious about what he might say next. Who were the ones that were truly ready to give their lives to him? Jesus makes use of strong language of his expectations for his disciples: We are to "hate" our family members and our very selves, we are to take up our cross and come after him, and we are to renounce our possessions. This strong language would certainly grab the attention of anyone who listens.

What is Jesus trying to say to us? How could Jesus who taught that the love of God and neighbor also say that we are to hate anyone, let alone our family members and our very lives? What does it mean to take up our cross and follow him? How can we live our daily lives if we renounce our possessions?

Jesus is asking that we live our lives with a spirit of detachment. Here is how St. Ignatius of Loyola: "It matters not if I am rich or poor, if I have good health or poor health, if I have a long life or a short life." One might say that St. Ignatius "hated" what everyone would say is most important in this life because he knew that it was all passing and that his heart was set on Jesus and everything that is eternal. St. Ignatius was a disciple who lived the meaning of today's Gospel and Jesus is asking us to do the same.

Taking up the cross is also about detachment. It means to die to ourselves, to let go of pride, anything that places myself above others and certainly anything that separate me from God.

To give up our possessions means to be willing to change the way we live. Our new Archbishop, Paul Etienne has already set the example. Without judging past bishops, he has decided that he will not live in Connolly House, the mansion where most of our bishops have lived since 1932. He said that we live in a different age now. The mansion is not a home for me. "One guy doesn't need that large of an ecological footprint." "I am a pastor not a prince," he said. He is willing to look at his own personal way of living to help to renew the Church. He will examine the possible options with others for the future of Connolly House. He is aware that the option of selling the property might provide funds for important ministries in the Archdiocese.

We in had to make adjustments to welcome the Catholic Community Services Family Shelter to stay at our parish between August 17 and October 1 from 8:30 at night to 6:45 in the morning. Our guests are parents with children under 18 years of age who are homeless. We had to move commitments for 54 groups to accommodate them. It was a sacrifice, but isn't that what it means to take up our cross? Is not that what it means to renounce our possessions? We as a parish and as families and individuals need to constantly examine what the rigorous teaching means. Without that, we cannot be his disciples.