

Homily Sunday 13C: 30 June 2013: HT-W/XII-PC

Many of you have seen Fr. Robert Barron's masterful video series *Catholicism*. If you haven't seen it, please do. Towards the start of the series, Fr. Barron makes an excellent point about Jesus of Nazareth. When you carefully study the historical figure of Jesus, you find a very disquieting, disturbing man. He makes extravagant claims about his person and mission, and he demands total fidelity unto death from his disciples. Contrary to the popular milquetoast version of Jesus, he is definitely NOT a nice guy who says nice things that make people feel nice. Today's gospel illustrates this quite well: when one would-be disciple asks permission to bury his father before following the Lord, he is abruptly rebuked--let the dead bury their dead; when another asks to say good-bye to his family, the Lord says no--no one who sets his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom. Nice guys don't talk like this, so they don't end up on crosses. And if Jesus were just a human being, these statements would be outrageous. But because Jesus is Lord, he can and occasionally does require that people abandon everything and follow him right here, right now, no ifs, ands, or buts.

The Lord's commands help us understand the urgency of vocation in Christian life. The Lord calls each and every one of us to discipleship, to nothing less than holiness of life. This discipleship is actualized in particular states of life such as priesthood, religious life, and Christian marriage. At critical points in life's course the urgency of the calling becomes crystal clear. I speak of religious experiences, conversion moments, decision points where the voice of Christ is perceived w/ special clarity. Think of episodes like when the Lord told Peter & Andrew, James & John, to follow him . . . and they left behind their careers and families to do so. The anonymous fellows in today's gospel got to hear Jesus' voice too; but they refused to follow. Consequently, we don't know who they were or what became of them.

Opportunities to hear Jesus' voice are granted to everyone. They can happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone. At Mass, we are privileged to hear the Lord's voice in the Scriptures and receive him in Holy Communion. One may also sense his presence in quiet prayer or the reading of the Bible. And sometimes the Lord appears in the most unlikely situations to the most undeserving persons. Remember St. Paul: he hated the Christian faith and was en route to arrest Jesus' followers: suddenly the Lord knocked him off his high horse and opened his blinded eyes to the truth of the gospel. The Lord gives everyone chances to hear his voice and answer: but these opportunities are not infinite in number; they are limited within the short span of a single lifetime. And the longer we go through life, and as our patterns of existence become more fixed, the odds of conversion diminish. We must listen carefully for Lord, and heed his summons while there is still a chance to do so. Procrastination in the time-sensitive matter of discipleship entails the risk of eternal loss.

I think today's lessons particularly important for our youth. You young folks will soon make decisions that will fix the course of your life for years to come: career, spouse, the possibility of a religious vocation to priesthood or consecrated life. Your choices will determine much of your future, maybe even your eternal destiny. It is crucial that you open your ears and hearts to Jesus' voice: in Scripture, in the liturgy, in private prayer. Ask what the Lord wants of you; how does he want you to follow him? And let his voice be your guide. For the good Lord desires only what is good for you, to give you the abundance of peace and joy that God alone can supply. Let's pray, brothers and sisters, that the grace of this Eucharist will open our ears to hear the Lord and strengthen our hearts to follow in his steps.