

**Renunciation**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**  
**(Lk 14:25-33)**

Jesus speaks of the renunciation required to be his disciple, and it occurs on three levels: possessions, people, self.

With regard to material goods, Jesus says, “*anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple*” (Lk 14:33). The danger with possessions is that they tend to “possess” us instead of serving us. We become attached to them. Due to concupiscence, we end up their servants instead of their masters. This can be seen especially with money, “mammon,” which becomes a love and a false god, whom we serve and depend upon. But it also happens with food, drink, and other bodily needs, when we fall into the trap of addiction.

To “renounce” means to sever any bond or claim that may exist. This means that as disciples we free ourselves from our possessions and those things needed for the support of the body, no longer treating them as our own, and giving them away as necessary. The benefit of this renunciation is that those material goods no longer exert a claim or influence over our will. Renunciation, “detachment” from goods, is a necessary condition for discipleship, says Jesus. Renunciation of possessions represents freedom to follow Christ, and shows that we truly serve God above all else.

Renunciation is not limited to material goods, however. Jesus stresses, in the strongest possible language, that it must also extend to relationships: “*If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters... he cannot be my disciple*” (Lk 14:26). Just as material things can dominate our lives and compromise our singular dedication to God, so can human relationships interfere with true discipleship. They must be spiritually purified, and this takes place through renunciation, detachment.

Love unites people in deep bonds, but due to concupiscence human love is always affected by some degree of selfishness. Our human bonds can become unreasonably emotional, utilitarian, or manipulative. We experience this particularly within the family, where the closeness often results in impatience and harshness, bringing out the worst in us instead of the best. Human relationships require a purification in order for us to serve God above all else, and this too means shifting our spiritual dependence away from people to God. We must learn to love others “in the Lord,” unselfishly, by means of *agape* love which is higher than natural *philos* or *eros*.

Some examples of how renunciation is needed in relationships include the following. 1) Teenagers who fall intensely in love tend to become consumed by that relationship to the detriment of their family and school responsibilities, requiring parents to intervene. Physical and emotional separation (“detachment”) are needed to restore balance. 2) Young couples who decide to live together before or without sacramental marriage, are putting a human relationship before their obligation to God. 3) When parents oppose the religious or priestly vocation of one of their children, the calling must be chosen even at the expense of family approval. 4) Within marriage, there must be a readiness to practice renunciation as necessary, for the sake of God or some greater good (cf. 1 Cor 7:5). It is in this spiritual context of discipleship that we should understand the sacrifices required by NFP, and why artificial contraception is always sinful.

Finally, Jesus teaches that renunciation must extend even to one’s life: *“If anyone comes to me without hating... even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”* (Lk 14:26). A true disciple is ready to lay down his life if necessary, in order to stay faithful to God. This is the witness of the martyrs. *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple”* (Lk 14:27). Renunciation is perfected in the ability to accept and embrace one’s cross, the willingness to follow Christ to Calvary itself.

The teaching of Jesus is clear: nothing and no one must be higher than one’s duty to love and serve God; everything and everyone should be renounced which would compromise one’s discipleship.