

GOSPEL
Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way and he turned and spoke to them. 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 'And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying, "Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish." Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.'

HOMILY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
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If we listen to today's Gospel, if we listen to what the Lord is saying to us, it frightens us: "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has and all links with his family cannot be my disciple." We would like to object: What are you saying, Lord? Isn't the family just what the world needs? Doesn't it need the love of father and mother, the love between parents and children, between husband and wife? Don't we need love for life, the joy of life? And don't we also need people who invest in the good things of this world and build up the earth we have received, so that everyone can share in its gifts? Isn't the development of the earth and its goods another charge laid upon us? If we listen to the Lord more closely, and above all if we listen to him in the context of everything he is saying to us, then we understand that Jesus does not demand the same from everyone. Each person has a specific task, to each is assigned a particular way of discipleship.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is speaking directly of the specific vocation of the Twelve, a vocation not shared by the many who accompanied Jesus on his journey

to Jerusalem. The Twelve must first of all overcome the scandal of the Cross, and then they must be prepared truly to leave everything behind; they must be prepared to assume the seemingly absurd task of travelling to the ends of the earth and, with their minimal education, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world filled with claims to erudition and with real or apparent education – and naturally also to the poor and the simple. They must themselves be prepared to suffer martyrdom in the course of their journey into the vast world, and thus to bear witness to the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Lord. If Jesus's words on this journey to Jerusalem, on which a great crowd accompanies him, are addressed in the first instance to the Twelve, his call naturally extends beyond the historical moment into all subsequent centuries. He calls people of all times to count exclusively on him, to leave everything else behind, so as to be totally available for him, and hence totally available for others: to create oases of selfless love in a world where so often only power and wealth seem to count for anything. Let us thank the Lord for giving us men and women in every century who have left all else behind for his sake, and have thus become radiant signs of his love. We need only think of people like Benedict and Scholastica, Francis and Clare of Assisi, Elizabeth of Hungary and Hedwig of Silesia, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and in our own day, Mother Teresa and Padre Pio. With their whole lives, these people have become a living interpretation of Jesus's teaching, which through their lives becomes close and intelligible to us. Let us ask the Lord to grant to people in our own day the courage to leave everything behind and so to be available to everyone.

Yet if we now turn once more to the Gospel, we realise that the Lord is not speaking merely of a few individuals and their specific task; the essence of what he says applies to everyone. The heart of the matter he expresses elsewhere in these words: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Lk 9:24f.). Whoever wants to keep his life just for himself will lose it. Only by giving ourselves do we receive our life. In other words: only the one who loves discovers life. And love always demands

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going out of oneself, it always demands leaving oneself. Anyone who looks just to himself, who wants the other only for himself, will lose both himself and the other. Without this profound losing of oneself, there is no life. The restless craving for life, so widespread among people today, leads to the barrenness of a lost life. “Whoever loses his life for my sake ...”, says the Lord: a radical letting-go of our self is only possible if in the process we end up, not by falling into the void, but into the hands of Love eternal. Only the love of God, who loses himself for us and gives himself to us, makes it possible for us also to become free, to let go, and so truly to find life. This is the heart of what the Lord wants to say to us in the seemingly hard words of this Sunday’s Gospel. With his teaching he gives us the certainty that we can build on his love, the love of the incarnate God. Recognition of this is the wisdom of which today’s reading speaks to us. Once again, we find that all the world’s learning profits us nothing unless we learn to live, unless we discover what truly matters in life.

Because Sunday is ultimately about encountering the risen Christ in word and sacrament, its span extends through the whole of reality. The early Christians celebrated the first day of the week as the Lord’s day, because it was the day of the resurrection. Yet very soon, the Church also came to realise that the first day of the week is the day of the dawning of creation, the day on which God said: “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). Therefore Sunday is also the Church’s weekly feast of creation – the feast of thanksgiving and joy over

God’s creation. At a time when creation seems to be endangered in so many ways through human activity, we should consciously advert to this dimension of Sunday too. Then, for the early Church, the first day increasingly assimilated the traditional meaning of the seventh day, the Sabbath. We participate in God’s rest, which embraces all of humanity. Thus we sense on this day something of the freedom and equality of all God’s creatures.

In this Sunday’s Opening Prayer we call to mind firstly that through his Son God has redeemed us and made us his beloved children. Then we ask him to look down with loving-kindness upon all who believe in Christ and to give us true freedom and eternal life. We ask God to look down with loving-kindness. We ourselves need this look of loving-kindness not only on Sunday but beyond, reaching into our everyday lives. As we ask, we know that this loving gaze has already been granted to us. What is more, we know that God has adopted us as his children, he has truly welcomed us into communion with himself. To be someone’s child means, as the early Church knew, to be a free person, not a slave but a member of the family. And it means being an heir. If we belong to God, who is the power above all powers, then we are fearless and free. And then we are heirs. The inheritance he has bequeathed to us is himself, his love. Yes, Lord, may this inheritance enter deep within our souls so that we come to know the joy of being redeemed. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What do you think Jesus means when he says we must “lose our life” to truly find it? How does that challenge common ideas of success?



Heart: How do you feel when you consider letting go of things, relationships, or comforts that compete with your love for Christ?



Hands: What is one practical way this week you can take a step toward deeper discipleship by making more space for Christ in your daily life?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.