

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 14:25-33

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

At this point, I am finding the Buddha *very* appealing!

Alright, let’s try to understand what on earth (or in heaven) Jesus might be saying.

If I understand correctly, when I was 12, and I told my parents that I hated them,

- it was actually one of my better moments?
- I found myself at the threshold of truer Christian discipleship?

Am I *missing* something?

Are these the mysterious ways in which God works?

Or am I being too literal?

I mean, it does say “*hate*”...

Is Jesus simply expressing what is revealed about God in the Old Testament:

“I, the LORD your God, am a *jealous* God.” (Exodus 20:5)

And we all know how jealousy works.

The old girlfriend (or the old boyfriend) re-enters the picture...

“Honey, can you get rid of her? Otherwise, I will, *permanently*.”

Jealousy is based on hatred.

If and when we speak of the jealousy of God, we do so *very differently*.

If “God is love” (I John), then God cannot hate.

Brother Roger (Schutte) of Taize says:

“Where is the source of our hope? It is in God, a God who simply loves and can do nothing else, a God who never stops seeking us.”

We are speaking *analogically*, i.e. about two totally *different* things

– human jealousy and divine jealousy –

which nonetheless have a little something in common.

God, Jesus, does not and cannot hate

my father and mother, brothers and sisters, or my life.

(Now, there may be fleeting moments when I wish he did, but that’s another story!)

God’s jealousy is not with respect to them.

God’s jealousy is with respect to *me*.

Divine jealousy is similar to human jealousy only regarding the exclusivity of relationship that it leads the jealous person (in this case, God) to want.

Even then, it is a somewhat tricky to speak of “exclusivity of relationship”.

“Exclusive” here means “singular” and “unique”.

In other words, Jesus wants a personal relationship with us like no other!

The structure and order of what Jesus says, however, obliges us to uncover more. This discourse opens and closes with strong, unsettling statements. These statements, in turn, frame two examples that Jesus gives of “prudential planning”.

1. an example drawn from construction
2. an example drawn from battle

The statements that frame are about discipleship, and thus the two examples are to be used precisely to consider discipleship.

What is discipleship?

Does discipleship not imply two aspects?

1. being *formed* by Jesus
2. being *led* by Jesus

These, however, are experienced and lived within the context of the aforementioned intimate relationship.

In other words, the context for true discipleship is always *love*.

Jesus says in John 15:15,

“I no longer call you servants; I call you *friends*, for I have told you everything I have heard from the Father.”

Paraphrased: “I have shared with/given to you everything that is in my heart”.

With these two parables about prudence,

i.e. about discerning right means to a specific end,

Jesus invites us to discern right means to the end

that is discipleship lived in the intimate relationship to which we are called.

So let us ask ourselves: what human means do I have at my disposal to live in communion with Christ and follow him?

Uh, my degree? my friends? my bank account? how about my great creative intuitions?

Uh, can you say, *none*. Strictly speaking, *none*.

You see, Jesus is provoking the discovery that we cannot be disciples

- of our own doing
- of our own means

Jesus says in the same chapter 15 of John’s gospel, “Apart from me you can do nothing”.

Now, Jesus is not talking about making pizza or fixing a car.

Jesus is talking about *relationship* and *discipleship* with him.

Jesus makes of us disciples.

In other words, *God* is the one divinizes and leads us to new heights.

Thus, the various statements of Jesus provoke the discovery of true discipleship.

Do you see how far we are beyond the notion

that God is one more cute thing on my horizon?

I have my spouse and my car and my hobbies and my God and my remote and my bed.

Uh, *no*.

Jesus reveals:

- the absoluteness of his person and presence
- the absoluteness of our need for him in order to enter this relationship

It is not about hating loved ones or possessions.

It is about

- complete abandonment
- complete surrender

in which I am willing to let God do with my loved ones and my possessions as he pleases

Jesus speaks in terms of hatred and renunciation because these bespeak *separation*.

Jesus speaks in such negative terms because, oddly, it helps us to understand better the freeing of the heart necessary to allowing God to take complete hold.

Note that such freeing is a question of *willingness*, not of emotional detachment.

A true disciple lays bare his/her heart,

and allows Christ, the God-man, free loving reign.

And in so doing we are drawn into the mystery of the Cross, wherein and whereby

“God so loves the world”.

This is a glimpse into the deeper meaning

of an intrinsic aspect of discipleship, “Take up your cross...”

Of course, it means:

we are to accept daily hardship as part of our journey in Christ’s footsteps.

But, more deeply, it means:

there is only one cross that is redemptive, i.e.

that can make use of hardship as an occasion for greater love.

The cross is the Cross of Christ (“a stumbling block and foolishness” I Cor. 1:21).

The Cross of Christ is the mystery of

- Christ pouring himself forth in love
- God loving through death

To “take up my cross” so to follow Jesus

is to let myself be drawn into the mystery of Christ pouring himself forth.

This will imply accepting hardship. But, more importantly, it means letting Jesus

- visit and love me in my hardship
- lead me to love there where I never thought possible

Let us express willingness.

“Lord, I don’t really know what this is all about, and I don’t *feel* much happening.

But deep inside I am drawn, and I want to know you.

I want to experience the singular, unique relationship that you want with me, and that you make possible.”

Let us let go and fall into the arms of Love...