

Homily for Trinity II – 2022 - The Cost of Discipleship

In today's Gospel reading, St Luke introduces some potential disciples who offer a variety of reasons as to why Our Lord's call to ministry is "impossible" for them to accept.

We are surprised at Our Lord's sharp response to the first man's apparently willing discipleship. Undoubtedly though, Jesus would have been able to see more deeply into the man's heart than we can. Jesus is simply honest about the demands and the cost of a commitment we might make too lightly and a journey we might undertake too easily. It's difficult for most of us NOT to make the mistake of imagining, or at least hoping, that following Jesus wherever He leads will result in good things coming our way in this life. Yet Our Lord says... *"Foxes have holes and birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* Nobody can say that we have not been warned there is a cost of Discipleship. Don't expect a rose garden.

Our Lord's response to the second man sounds very harsh... *"Let the dead bury their dead"*... even too harsh to many of us. But, of course, the man's father was most likely (almost certainly) not even dead when he asked this favour. If the father was dead, the man would not have been on the road and numbered amongst those making their way to Jerusalem, in the first place... he would already be attending to his father's funeral arrangements and so forth. He simply wished to delay becoming a disciple and stay with his father until his father's death (whenever that might occur.) His seemingly decent request was really delaying tactic. Again, there is a cost to discipleship. Don't delay.

The third man wanted to go home and say farewell to his family before following the Lord. Once again, it seems such a reasonable and, shall we say, decent thing to do. Our Lord rebukes him too saying.. *"No man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom."* Why does Jesus say this? Quite simply because looking back while plowing causes crooked

lines in the field. Once again, and in no uncertain terms, we are reminded that there is a cost to Christian discipleship. Don't look back.

The response of Jesus to the three would-be followers, described in the second part of today's Gospel, exemplifies the wholehearted constancy and sacrificial ministry that Christian discipleship requires.

Albert Einstein, the famous and brilliant German-born mathematician and physicist, a man who was Jewish by birth and who became a Swiss citizen in the early years of the 20th century, was living in the USA by the 1930's and there he watched his former homeland give in to Adolf Hitler's Fascist dictatorship. Einstein wondered if any were going to stand up and oppose Hitler. He said, and I quote, *"When Hitlerism came to Germany, I expected the Universities to oppose it. Instead they embraced it. I hoped for the press to denounce it, but instead they propagated its teachings. One by one the leaders and institutions which should have opposed the Nazi philosophy bowed meekly to its authority. Only one institution met it with vigorous opposition and that was the Christian Church."* Einstein confessed, *"That which I once despised, I now love with a passion I cannot describe."* The commitment of brave members of the Church in standing against evil made a profound impression upon Einstein.

Christians who in the 1930's and during the Second World War understood the cost associated with their actions, did not back down. There were tens of thousands of Christians across Europe who stood up to Nazism as best they could according to their state in life... priests, ministers, nuns, monks, brave lay men and women. Thousands of them were murdered by the Nazis, many thousands were imprisoned. They all lived in fear day by day that their activities of resistance, in whatever form they took, would be uncovered. There is a cost to discipleship!

One of the best known of the German Christians who stood against the evil of Nazism was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran Pastor and

theologian, who wrote a series of reflections on the Sermon on the Mount entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he maintained that discipleship requires that we make a fundamental decision to follow Jesus and to accept the consequences of that decision. His own religious convictions led him to stand up to the tyranny of Nazi Germany and to participate in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. The plot was uncovered, Bonhoeffer was apprehended, and the ultimate “cost of discipleship” was exacted: he was hanged by the Nazis on April 9, 1945.

Long before, St Paul gave testimony to what the cost of discipleship was for him after his conversion to Christian faith on the Road to Damascus. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul tells of his “cost of discipleship” saying....

“Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys; in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the Churches.”

And as we know so well, that was not the end of the cost paid by that mighty man for the gospel, as he too was beheaded by the Emperor Nero outside the walls of Rome. There is a cost to discipleship.

The excuses that were proffered by the three nameless disciples and Our Lord’s sharp responses to them, along with the faithful witness of so many others ... human and fallible like us... challenge us as faithful Christian people to examine to what extent the often flimsy alibis we offer to escape responsible membership, service and ministry in the Church, have any merit. We, too, are asked to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, right now and without

reservation, by surrendering our lives to God in the service of others.

Dear faithful people, there is a cost to faithful discipleship. Today let us ask for the grace of faithfulness in following Jesus in our daily living.