

September 8, 2013 Hating Father and Mother:

My dear brothers and sisters, perhaps some of you may remember the legendary Hall of Fame football player Gale Sayers. For many years he was the featured running back of the Chicago Bears. Some years ago he wrote his autobiography in which he shared some wonderful memories of his life on and off the field. In view of today's gospel reading (Lk 14:25-33), one anecdote told by the author is especially noteworthy. Around his neck he always wore a gold medal about the size of a half-dollar. Inscribed on the medal were three words: "I AM THIRD".

Those three words became the title of his best selling book. In his personal story Gale goes to great lengths to explain why the words meant so much to him. They were the motto of his track coach, Bill Easton, back at the University of Kansas, where he was enrolled as a student. Coach Easton kept the words on a little sign on his desk. Understandably curious, Gale one day asked him what they meant. The coach replied: "It's quite simple, really! The Lord is first, my friends are second and I am third." From that day forward Gale made those words the philosophy of his life.

In his second year with the Bears, Gale decided he wanted to wear something meaningful around his neck. So he bought a gold medal and had the words "I AM THIRD" engraved on it. In his autobiography, Gale writes "I try to live by the saying on the medal. I don't always succeed, but having the saying around my neck keeps me from straying from it too far".

Gale's story brings into sharp focus the words of Christ in today's gospel, when he says "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother.....and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple". In other words, Christ demands undivided and unconditional loyalty from his disciples. Even family ties must take a back seat to our life of Christian discipleship. Christ also insists that we consider carefully the cost of discipleship. The lukewarm and cowardly need not apply. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Lk:14:26).

In preparing today's homily, I was reminded of a key scene in the 1959 film "The Nun's Story". Two remarkable women are featured: a young novice whose dream is to serve as a missionary nursing Sister in the heart of the Belgian Congo in Africa and the Mother Superior of the Order who had spent many years of laboring as a nurse in Africa. Noting the youthful nun's ideals, she forewarned her of the hardships of serving the Lord in a harsh climate, with the real possibility of contracting a tropical disease such as malaria. In addition, she would likely endure the pain of her separation from her widowed father and younger sister and be sorely tested, living under obedience as a consecrated religious woman. She cautioned the young women to prayerfully consider the consequences of a missionary Sister before making such a life-changing decision.

Let us recall the words of Our Lord: "Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for completion?" Nowadays, too many of the faithful are content with an adulterated version of the faith known as

"Christianity lite". But a religion that requires few, if any, demands is surely not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we should give serious thought to the many Christians around the world who endure great suffering for their faithful witness to the gospel. If we wish to continue to "travel with Jesus" let us bear in mind his daunting challenge to all his true disciples and respond in a manner worthy of our vocation.

Amen