

September 13, 2015 Mystery of the Cross Homily:

My brothers and sisters, some of you in this congregation may recall a variety show dating back to the early days of television, featuring two ballroom dancers, Arthur and Catherine Murray. The show, Arthur Murray's dance party, premiered four years prior to the year of my birth in 1950. Amazingly, the show lasted until 1960. Now, in all honesty, I know little about ballroom dancing. However, I can still recall a bit of advice Mr. Murray offered to his viewers. He said, "Whenever you and your partner are on the dance floor, it is imperative that one take the lead and the other follow in his or her footsteps. A dancer might say to his partner, "Do you wish me to lead or would you rather do so? By taking the first step, the dancer leads and the partner follows. If he or she fails to do so, the couple makes a mess of things and is likely to be embarrassed on the dance floor!"

It is interesting to note that the pivotal chapters of Mark's gospel, eight, nine and ten, are often referred to by biblical scholars as a "journey narrative" No fewer than ten times do we hear the words, "the way". In today's gospel we heard the words; "Along *the way* he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am? (Mk.8:27) Christ is on the way to Jerusalem, where execution awaits him.

A closer look at the gospel can reveal the truth about genuine discipleship. When Christ says to Peter, "get behind me, Satan" (Mk.8:33) it is as if he were saying to him, "Get back in line, you are to be my follower, walking behind me." The disciple never dictates to his master what he must do or how he must act. Heaven forbid! Christ must lead! The disciple does not decide where he must go. If we wish to follow Jesus, we must follow behind Jesus and go where he goes. It is a path that leads inevitably to a cross! Jesus is quite adamant on this very point. If you wish to "Come after me", you must take up your cross and follow Me." (Mk.8:34) To follow Jesus is a key term for discipleship.

The stunning and tragic plight of the Syrian refugees is a case in point. Many have been exiled from their homeland simply because of their Christian faith. According to a report in a recent issue of the Wall Street Journal a large letter "N" was painted on the homes of Christians by the minions of ISIS. The "N" stands for Nazarene, a reference to the place of Our Lord's rearing, Nazareth. And the penalty? Their homes were burned to the ground and many were later taken captive and then brutally tortured. Those heroic Christians have embraced the mystery of the cross.

Many Christians today have embraced a Christianity with few, if any, demands. It is a version of the faith that I have coined, "Christianity Lite". To be inconvenienced is intolerable for so many of us today. We prefer "easy street" and not the way of the cross. The cross seems to have disappeared. How sad! But not for those who are witnesses to the faith. God bless the Syrian Christian! The life of a Christian is not "a waltz". The culture in which we live is not a "ball room" for those who have suffered persecution for their faith in Jesus rather... it is a march, a "slave march", a "dance macabre"!

In conclusion, let us recall the words spoken by Jesus to his disciple Peter after his resurrection: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (Jn. 21:18).

Amen!