

September 4, 2016 The Cost of Discipleship Homily:

Brothers and sisters, reflecting on today's gospel reading (Lk.14:25-33), I am reminded of a remarkable scene in a film dating back to the late 1950's. The film's title is "The Nun's Story" and features a promising young actress, Audrey Hepburn as an idealistic young Belgian woman whose sole objective is life is to become a missionary nursing nun working in a Belgian mission in the Congo on the African continent. The setting is a chapel, young women have gathered to be admitted as postulants of the religious order. The Reverend Mother, a nun with many years of experience laboring in the missions, speaks candidly about the hard life of a nursing sister. Her words are challenging. "The life of a nun is not easy. It is a life of sacrifice. It is a never ending struggle for self-perfection. In a way, it is a life against nature. Poverty, chastity and obedience are daily challenges. All sacrifices are bearable if they are done for love. The nun can endure great sacrifices because the object of her love is Jesus Christ".

Her words surely indicate that serving in the mission field presents a daunting challenge. One need only consider the tropical heat, the possibility of disease, particularly Malaria, homesickness, tribal factions and encounters with pagan religions. Then the Reverend Mother issued a challenge to the young women; "Consider the step you are about to take? Do not take make your decision in haste. Count the cost of discipleship. If you have doubts, now is the time to leave!"

In two memorable parables, the tower builder and the king going to war, (Lk.14:28-32) Jesus forewarns his disciples about the personal cost of following him. The life of a disciple is not easy. A true disciple must be willing to follow Jesus whatever the cost. Half-hearted, tepid parties must be turned away. Hence they should not make a commitment to sacrifice for him lightly, but should determine if they have the fortitude to dedicate themselves to him. In his classic book on the parables of Jesus, the Protestant scholar Joachim Jeremias, writes, "To be near Jesus is dangerous and it offers no prospect of earthly fortune, but involves the fire of tribulation and earthly suffering".

When Jesus made demands of his followers, he knew what lay ahead of him, namely, rejection by Jewish leaders, arrest and torture, and condemnation. Following the One labeled a criminal by the leaders of his own people is challenging enough! Are we serious about the promises we make to the Lord? Do we recognize the risks of following a man condemned to death on a cross? The two parables of Jesus truly urge us to consider well and calculate the costs before setting out.

Early in his pontificate, Pope John Paul visited the largely secular country of France, and gently scolded French Catholics. He asked them a pointed question: "Have you been faithful to your baptismal promises?" And what about each one of us, do we seek the "easy way" and not the "way of the cross? Are we enemies of the cross (quoting St. Paul).

Let us be reminded that, as disciples, we are not left alone. Christ walks with us, Christ walks ahead of us.

Jesus said "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple". (Lk:14:27) Strong words, indeed? Are we listening?

Amen!