

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the joys of going on an organised holiday is that nearly everything is organised for us. We don't have to make many decisions. Some of the bigger decisions are about what time we get, what we might wear and what we have for breakfast. But ordinary life is not like that is it? There are many decisions that we need to make every day. Some of those decisions can be quite difficult and may come at a great cost.

Today Jesus reminds us that the decision to follow him and live as his disciples demands a lot of us. He talks about that decision in terms of what we might need to leave behind and in terms of the weight of the cross we might be asked to carry. Luke tells us that great crowds accompanied Jesus as he made his way towards Jerusalem. Some of them would have probably seen the journey as a march towards freedom from Roman rule. None of them would have anticipated what would happen to Jesus when he got to Jerusalem. Jesus turns to the crowd and warns them of the cost of following him. Just as Jesus had to make hard choices to continuing along the road to Jerusalem so must the people following him have to make hard choices if they want to become and remain disciples of Jesus.

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife children and his own life too, he cannot be

my disciple.” That word “hate” can be misleading. In the Aramaic idiom used by Jesus hate has nothing to do with the way that we feel towards another person. Perhaps it is best understood as meaning to turn away from or to detach oneself from another person. Jesus wants us to be clear that when we become his disciples then our commitment to him must take preference over any other commitments we make, even those to our own family. We must be detached enough from even the members of our own families to have the freedom to choose first what God wants for us.

But there is some irony in this isn't there? When we set out to choose what God wants for us every day, we find ourselves not moving away from the people that we love but moving even closer to them. When we become detached enough and free enough to love Jesus, we find that we become detached enough and free enough to love those around us in a new way. Think of people like Mother Teresa. Her commitment to Jesus was absolute. And yet the closer she became to Jesus the closer she became to those who needed her love and care in the world in which she lived. Loving Jesus can never be an excuse for not loving members of our family or anyone else.

But loving is never easy. Jesus tells us in our gospel today that we cannot be his disciples if we are not ready

to carry our crosses after him. The way that Luke puts it makes it clear that Jesus calls us to bear our crosses daily. And we are the ones who carry them, not anyone else. Our crosses may be quite different from the ones carried by the person beside us. But we are all called to walk humbly in the footsteps of the Lord and to keep renewing our commitment to be like him in the way that we love. It is good to look around and to notice those who are walking the road of discipleship with us. That is one of the great joys of being part of the Church. We rub shoulders with many living saints and learn from them how to live. Those who have been declared saints, people like Mother Teresa of Calcutta whose feast day was celebrated last Thursday, can teach us too.

Jesus talks about sitting down and working out the cost of a tower before we start to build it. He talks about working out if we can win a battle before we face the enemy. A person of faith takes on their role in their family and in the wider community trusting that God will be with them, giving them the courage and the love that they will need to fulfil their commitment to their spouse and their children. They trust that God will be there for them as they stand up for what is just and fair in our society.

This weekend there are eleven children beginning their preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation and

Reconciliation. The families of these children are setting out on a journey with their children to come to know Jesus even better than they know him now. It will not be easy to find time each week to sit with their children and to reflect and to pray with them. But the choice they make to do this, no matter how difficult it might be at times, is one that will reap its rewards. They will come to know more deeply how close Jesus is to each one of them. Today these families ask for our prayers and our support.

This week I celebrated the 48th. anniversary of my ordination. Many of our class and their wives gathered at Casterton with Frank and Rita McInerney. I thought that I knew what it meant to be a priest when I was ordained, but it didn't take me long to discover that I didn't really know what God was calling me to be and to do when Archbishop Gleeson laid hands on me 48 years ago. What I soon learnt was that that God's Spirit would be with me to guide me and to strengthen me for all that God wanted me to do. I learnt that God would gift me with whatever I needed to do his work. I learnt that I could recommit myself to the service of the Lord each day. And surely that's how it is for all of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus. Each day we look to see where Jesus is and we follow where he leads us. We put our hope and trust in the God who gives us the strength to be faithful to his choice for us to be his disciples.