

## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP; SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

In today's Gospel account, Jesus delineates the cost of Christian discipleship but the essence of one's investment can be summed up thusly: a total giving of self. The Christian is expected to dedicate his entire life to the Gospel; indeed the Gospel must come to define the whole of the disciple's existence. In our reading, the uncompromising character of discipleship is examined from three aspects of human life: priority, suffering and renunciation.

First and foremost, following Jesus must be one's top priority, greater even than family responsibilities. The use of idiomatic language like hating "*one's own father and mother and wife and children*" is indicative of this. Make no mistake, this is a high cost indeed! This is what the parable concerning whether or not a general should sue for peace as he approaches a battle is all about. If you cannot pay the price of the needed total commitment, then it is best not to undertake the journey. The making of baptismal promises demands such and this gravity extends even to their annual renewal at the Easter Vigil. Those who equivocate at such promise-keeping should remain silent at such a rite and even refrain from receiving holy communion (which reception itself requires a commitment renewal).

Next, it is surely a truism to note that all humans suffer, for indeed to be alive on earth is to often experience suffering and no one whether young or old can fully escape it. Christians too suffer, but we are asked to do so in conscious union with our Lord. At baptism, all Christians are given a cross and are asked to carry it until the moment of their death. It is also likely that during their lives

Christians will be asked to exchange these smaller crosses for larger ones. One might choose to do this for the salvation of souls or for the alleviation of some of the pain of the world. Again, all suffer, but the disciple of Jesus is asked to suffer both with meaning and sometimes voluntarily.

Finally, Jesus focuses on the thorny issue of possessions. This term should be interpreted broadly and would include not just material stuff, but also honors, reputation, power, security and the like. If one would be a disciple of the Lord, he must practice a radical detachment from the things of this world. Material poverty is not necessarily the goal – would that it were that simple! The parable of the tower is illustrative here, for the edifice of Christian faith cannot be completed without expending **all** of one's resources. Hold anything back and the emptiness of soul required to receive Jesus is not achieved.

One therefore must come forward at Mass as an expression of a faith life fully and completely dedicated to Christ. In this way only can the manifold graces of the crucified and risen Lord be welcomed into our soul with abiding effect.