

Commentary on the Gospel: Following Christ Closely

Gospel for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 14:25-33*)

Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build, and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

Commentary

Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem accompanied by his disciples, and many others joined them along the way. It was easy to be carried away by the enthusiasm stirred up by his warm words, by his cordial welcome (especially for the most needy), and by his contagious joy. But Jesus doesn't want anyone following Him to be deceived. Trying moments will come, since awaiting Him in Jerusalem is the Cross.

Following Jesus is not joining a triumphal march, but rather taking on commitments out of love that entail sacrifice and suffering. Whoever desires to follow Him has to be free of ties that make it difficult to dedicate all their time to Him, or that rob them of the energies needed to assist Him in the work of Redemption. Jesus speaks so clearly here that his words about detachment from one's family might seem harsh to us. Doesn't God

command us to love, reverence and obey our parents? How can Jesus use such strong words, which seem to contradict this commandment?

Jesus needs faithful followers. But the Master is well aware of how hard it is to resist the affection of one's parents, friends, or close relatives, and that these, often with a good intention, can let themselves be led more by their heart than by faith and reason. Therefore his strong language leaves no room for ambiguity. Saint John Chrysostom, in speaking about obeying one's parents, says that "in those things only does he mean us to obey, as many as do not hinder godliness. For indeed it is a sacred duty to render them all other honors: but when they demand more than is due, one ought not to obey." Jesus' harsh words in Saint Luke about one's father and mother are "not commanding us simply to hate them, since this were

even quite contrary to the Law. But ‘when one desires to be loved more than I am, hate him in this respect. For this ruins both the beloved, and the lover.’ And these things He said, both to render the children more determined, and to make the fathers more gentle, that would hinder them.”[1]

Faithful to the Gospel teaching, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says in this regard: “Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social.”[2] Hence God makes use of good Christian families to sow in the children love for Him and for all men and women, and to foster in them the generosity needed to center their lives on Christ, with the children finding in their parents the support needed to follow their own vocation in the Church.

To explain what centering our life on Christ involves, He makes use of two parables: the building of a tower and the king who goes to war. Both show us the importance of not being carried away by a shallow impulse, but rather the need to weigh carefully everything that is involved before making a decision to follow Him. If we want to assist Christ in the work of Redemption, a half-hearted dedication is of no use—saying yes but refusing to break with all earthly ties: “whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Christ’s words are addressed to everyone: both to those who are discerning a vocation, as well as to those who make up their family and social milieu.

The experience of the saints encourages us to respond freely and generously to what God wants of us. “Let us accept God’s will and be firmly resolved to build all our life in

accordance with what our faith teaches and demands. We can be sure this will involve struggle and suffering and pain. But if we hold fast to the faith we will never feel we have lost God's favor. In the midst of sorrow and even calumny, we will experience a happiness spurring us to love others, to help them share in our supernatural joy.”[3]

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Mathew*, 35.

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1618.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 97.

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(04/06/2026)