

Jesus’ words in today’s gospel are **HARD**. What else can you say about statements that discipleship means we must: hate our father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, even our own life; carry our own cross; renounce all our possessions? Whatever became of the definition of “gospel” as “Good News”?

Over the years as I’ve reflected and prayed on these words of Jesus I have come to realize that it isn’t primarily our external relationships to family and possessions that Jesus is asking us to consider, nor about bearing physical sufferings although we all know life brings us “crosses” in many forms. No, I believe what Jesus is talking about is an attitude of heart. One can renounce all material possessions or claim to them, as a person does who enters a monastery or similar community and still not live what Jesus is talking about. Or one could suffer great physical or psychological pain but still not fulfill Jesus’ command. How so? Because in the depth of their heart the person never relinquished the fundamental essence of themselves to God.

Jesus is reminding us that all that exists: the world, our life; its relationships and possessions, is ours **not by right but as gift from God**. In the ordering of life’s allegiances we must always keep this truth before us. Nothing or no one is occupy the place of supreme priority God is to have in our life—not family, possessions, country, even the church. God, it has been said, is a jealous lover. God wants all of us—all of us with nothing held back not because God is some type of authoritarian dictator, but because God is supreme love.

Anything worth possessing is going to cost us. Just as a wise person sits down and calculates what a monthly house, car, or other major purchase payment is going to cost in real dollars and its effect on other aspects of one’s individual or family lifestyle, so too, discipleship. Being a disciple is not something we “take or leave” or do “when I get around to it” or “when I feel like it” or “when it’s convenient.” Jesus in demanding such whole-hearted commitment does not ask us what he himself does not do. The context of today’s gospel is Jesus’ own journey to Jerusalem where on the cross he will suffer and

die to the world and his total self-sacrifice of love to the Father even as that sacrifice will be accepted by the Father and transformed into the resurrection and glorification of his human nature and offered to us through God's indwelling Holy Spirit within us, the supreme gift of eternal life.

Is it possible to actually live such a lifestyle of total love for God above all within the context of other loves so that one's love becomes the source of other's salvation?

Recently I read of the death of Maria Jaegerstatter, the wife of Franz Jaegerstatter. Franz Jaegerstatter was a farmer from the town of St. Radegund in Austria at the time of the Nazi occupation in the last century. Like all able-bodied men he was drafted to serve in the German army. Franz through prayer had come to a conscience objection to all Adolf Hitler and the Nazis stood for and so refused to report for induction. Aware that such refusal carried the certainty of death, as well as the enmity of his townspeople, his relatives, parish priest and the diocesan bishop urged Franz to "do his duty to his country" and put his moral reservations aside until after the war. Torn, Franz realized that to do so would betray not only his family, community and country—it would ultimately betray his commitment to God and cause the loss of his soul. Arrested by the Nazis for his stance Franz was beheaded in a prison in Berlin in 1941. Beatified by Pope Benedict XVI, he will be canonized as a martyr of conscience in the near future.

Yes, Jesus asks a lot. Such commitment does not happen instantaneously. There is always room in our lives to grow deeper into Christ. Over the past few months we have heard about a faith growth process--**ALPHA FOR CATHOLICS**. ALPHA begins this week. I hope many of us will accept this invitation to grow into deeper personal relationship and commitment to Jesus. Through study of the Scriptures, participation especially in the sacraments Penance and the Eucharist, through participation in a process such as ALPHA, and through daily personal prayer we have the means to live totally in and for God amid our relationships to family, material possessions and the strength to face life's crosses in the sure hope of eternal life.