

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C - *If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, ... and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*
September 4, 2022.

Jesus is making two things clear to us in this Sunday's Gospel reading (Luke 14:25-33). First, he wants us to have no illusions about following him. His path is a hard path. Discipleship doesn't come cheaply. **It will involve self-sacrifice and suffering: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."** That is the obvious lesson in this Gospel passage and we can never forget it. But there is another lesson equally worth our attention. Jesus is saying that following him involves more than feelings and vague inspirations. The Lord uses a word that is shocking - **HATE**. Let's focus on this "**HATE**" which has no place in Christianity. We cannot allow it to be used in our lives, in our families, in our homes. We can feel strongly opposed to someone or something, but we cannot hate that person or that thing. **Hate is the antithesis of love.** The Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount tells us **You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.** And, yet, here in this Sunday's Gospel we hear the Lord using that word that He Himself bans from Christianity, **If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.** Why? Many times Jesus spoke using apocalyptic concepts and language. In fact there are whole sections of Matthew, Mark and Luke that are called the Synoptic Apocalypse. The Lord uses extreme phrases and concepts to catch people's attention, to get them emotionally involved.

Jesus who summons us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-46); the one Isaiah calls the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6); the Jesus who promised the world will know his followers by their love (John 13:35), this same Jesus is asking me to hate my wife, my children, and my parents? Elsewhere, Scripture commands me to love my wife (Eph. 5:25), my children (Eph. 6:4), my parents (Exod. 20:12). What could our Saviour possibly mean by this explosive—and seemingly contradictory—ultimatum? If we take a closer look at the surrounding context, the nutshell meaning of his distressing words is as clear and concise as it is radical and revolutionary. **Jesus is telling his followers: "If you would be a Christian, I must have it all."** We may be scandalized by the "hate" speech, but I suspect in stumbling over Jesus's plain talk, we can miss the real scandal of this text: There will be rivals warring for supremacy over the throne of our hearts, but **our love for King Jesus must defeat every one.** Matthew 10:37 may provide the interpretational key to unlock what Jesus means by "hate" here: **"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."** Yes, we are to exhibit deep affections for our closest earthly kin, but Jesus is saying we must love even them less than we do him if we would prove to be genuine disciples.

Jesus is not demanding that we literally hate our family. Jesus is not asking us to abandon our spouse and kids, but that nothing be more important to us than our commitment to him. He is using hyperbole to illustrate the steep cost of following him. We cannot prefer anyone or anything to him. **No person or possession can ever claim us as he does!! Any prospective follower must be glad to give up everything, to love him unreservedly—to sell all in order to have him as our highest treasure (Matt. 13:44-46).** **Our affections for Christ must be of such an intensity and quality that, by comparison, all other loves seem like hate.** This is the first of three sobering warnings in Luke 14:26-33 against making a hasty decision to follow Jesus. A genuine disciple must: Love Jesus even more than our earthly family (v. 26), take up our cross and follow him (v. 27) and be willing to lay down everything—even our life—and go hard after him (v. 33). As a skilled talker, the Lord

illustrates his point with two pictures: A wise builder won't construct a tower unless he has first made certain he has enough materials to complete it. A wise king won't go to war unless he knows his army possesses enough firepower to have a fighting chance at repelling the enemy. God gives us a vivid application or illustration—perhaps even more shocking than Jesus's words—of the potential cost of discipleship in Genesis 22. God gave Abraham and Sarah their first son when they were senior citizens. The long-awaited son was the one through whom God would bring a greater son to rescue his people from sin and death. But God did something that must have stretched Abraham's faith to a breaking point: He told the patriarch to take the boy to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him as an act of worship. It's a test none of us would want to endure. Would Abraham love the gift more than the Giver? We all know how it turned out. Abraham trusted God, who provided a substitute—a ram to sacrifice in Isaac's place, giving us one of the clearest gospel pictures in the Old Testament. Abraham's faith, displayed in his obedience, powerfully illustrates what our Lord is driving at: "Yes, your spouse and kids and relatives are good gifts from my hands, but to which will you give your heart: them or me?" That's what Jesus is driving at.

So, at our best, we are unique reflections of the love of God. Anything, anyone that prevents us from being that reflection of God's love is unworthy of our true identity. Therefore, no one and nothing can stand in the way of our love of God. When we fall into sins, we become disjointed. We feel like we are not ourselves. When we fall into sins, we destroy our very identity. **We sacrifice being sons and daughters of God for a lesser, insignificant love, the love of ourselves.** That is why today's difficult passage where the Lord uses the word hate is immediately followed by His command: "**Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**" Following the Lord demands the total sacrifice of ourselves for Him. To let go of everything including our loved ones. This is difficult. This is a cross, a cross we must gladly embrace because there is no greater good in life than union with God. So, like the man constructing the tower or the king contemplating war, we have to use our intelligence to complete the work of building up that portion of the Body of Christ that each of us has been created to make real in the world. Following Christ is not a temporary recruitment but a lifelong commitment that requires self sacrifice, abandonment of possessions, families and friends, even our own lives. As we know, there are many saints who have done that. Are we willing to commit? Are we ready to become saints?

Brothers and sisters, this takes determination. This takes drive. We have to have the determination and the drive to be the people each of us has been called to be. We have to have the determination and the drive to be true to our identities. Anything that prevents us from our own unique ways of following the Lord is unworthy of who we are. **When St. Perpetua's father pleaded with her to save her life and renounce Christ, she responded, *But father, look at that pot. You cannot say it is not a pot. I cannot give up who I am. I am a Christian.*** And so are we! Anything that keeps us from being who we really are, we must hate. Amen.