

Homily 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A Matt 10:37-42

Today's gospel is a continuation of the passage we heard last weekend, and Jesus continues to speak very frankly about what he expects from his disciples. His words should've served as a wake-up call for them, and they should serve as the same thing for us too.

Last weekend we heard that if we fail to acknowledge Jesus before others, he will deny us before his heavenly Father. And the readings for the weekday Masses of Ordinary Time this past week include passages like these,

“The gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many;” “Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire;” “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father.”

And today, the first half of the gospel follows up with a list of behaviors that are unworthy of Jesus. Hearing all this from the lips of the Lord could leave folks feeling somewhere between apprehensive and afraid. In essence, Jesus is sitting us down for a tough-love type of talk.

He's like, “Listen, you've been given the gift of life by my heavenly Father; you've been given the gift of our love; and I gave up *my life* to give you the gift of eternal life. You haven't earned any of these things; they're not some kind of reward, but have been freely given. So you need to respond in a way *worthy* of what you've received.”

Relative to today's gospel, that means we must make Jesus our number one priority. We must adopt the attitude St. Paul recommends to the Romans, and think of ourselves as dead to sin, and living for God in Christ Jesus.

We must live for God first ... not for parents, or children, or self, or country, or culture, or career. If we live for God first, everything else will fall into its proper place. If we don't, we're not worthy of Jesus.

An important distinction is needed here. When Jesus says certain types of people are ‘not worthy of me’, he means they're not living out their lives in a manner worthy of the call they've received to be his faithful disciples. He does not mean that they have no worth, or value in his eyes.

Our value or dignity as human persons comes exclusively from the facts that one, God made us in his image and likeness; and two, God loves us unconditionally. Nothing that we do or say, or fail to do or say can diminish our dignity as God's children. Our unworthy behavior does not render us worthless in God's eyes.

Ok, so what's our deal? Is Jesus truly our top priority in life? // Well in theory at least, I'd like to think we'd all answer, "Of course he is ... of course I love him more than mother or father or son or daughter. Of course I love him more than myself, and would be willing to forego finding my life for his sake. And of course, I would continue to follow him even if it means carrying a heavy cross."

The real question is, 'How do our lives bear that out?' That each of you are here at Mass in the midst of a pandemic, means I don't have to tell you that this is the primary way, we make Jesus our top priority. Now, going to Mass is vitally important, but it's not the only issue.

There is the issue of our personal relationship with Jesus. Are we so in love with spending time with others in person, on the phone, or through social media ... are we so in love with staying busy, being productive and a sense of accomplishment ... are we so in love with our leisure time or sleeping well ...

... that the quality, alone time we should be devoting to prayer to nurture our friendship with the Lord, each and every day, gets minimized, or squeezed out of the picture altogether? PAUSE

Most of us have friends or family who don't share our faith, or who find themselves alienated from the Church for some reason.

Now matters of faith and morals naturally come up in conversation from time to time. When they do, does our love for these people, and our love for the peace and comfort in the relationships we share, rise above our love for Jesus, so that when we could ***lovingly witness*** to the truth of his gospel, we stay silent instead, for fear of introducing awkwardness, anger, or the hostility of heated discussion. PAUSE

Taking up the cross is never easy. We might need some time to adjust our footing under its weight before we can steadily move forward. Anger, frustration and fear are natural responses at first.

So our first job is to actively work through those emotions and arrive at a humble, trusting acceptance of the cross. Then, we need to make a deliberate offering – a conscious, selfless, sacrificial act of unifying our suffering to the Passion of Christ.

And we shouldn't overlook the splinters either. Of all the things that make up our cross, we might be tempted only to focus on the two or three that comprise the crossbeam. But even the smallest sliver of wood is important, and when lovingly offered to Christ, can be transformed by Him, to yield much fruit.

Every day I try to cover everything from beams to splinters with this prayer to Mary, whom I trust will present my Cross to her Son. These are words I came up with during my treatment; naturally you can come up with words of your own.

“Mary, holy Virgin Mother, I offer you all my struggles, challenges, discomfort, discouragement, disappointment, frustrations, annoyances, insecurities, inconveniences, humiliations, misunderstandings, temptations, fatigue, hunger and pain, to be used according to your good pleasure, for the greater glory of God.”

Finally my friends, there's the issue behind this paradoxical statement in today's gospel, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” // But is it really a bad thing to try to find oneself?

Isn't that really what life's all about ... to answer questions like, 'Who am I?', 'What is the meaning of my life?' and 'What am I supposed to do with my life?'

Today many of our graduates are on the verge of trying to answer those very questions, and embarking on a journey of self-discovery. That's not at all a bad thing, for them or for any of us, provided ... provided we remain firmly rooted in our primary identity, as Catholic Christian disciples.

Moments will arise when the search for who we are will conflict, with who we already know ourselves to be, as faithful followers of Jesus. In those moments, if we're willing to redirect, or even abandon the search, to lose our lives for the sake of Jesus, then we'll find our true identity, and true fulfillment in this life. If we're unwilling to do that, we're not worthy of Jesus. **PAUSE**

The painful choices that we have to make, as we face finding our way through this world, and as we face dealing with family and friends, in many ways represent, the cross Jesus refers to in today's gospel. Following after Him isn't easy, it might cost us that which is dear to us ...

... but when the going gets tough, Jesus expects us to take up the cross and get going ... right down the road he's laid out for us. If instead, we leave our cross by the side of that road, or head off in a completely different direction, we're not worthy of Jesus. PAUSE

Regardless our missteps, always remember, that although at times we act unworthily, we are not thereby rendered worthless ... so with contrite, yet confident hearts, we humbly turn to our God to pray in a way we so often pray together ...

“Lord, I am not worthy of the love you've shown me, I am not worthy of all you endured for me, so help me Lord ... for I am not worthy, that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”