

Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Philemon 1-21, Luke 14:25-3 Psalm 1

**Theme: Getting your priorities right**

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" Earlier he said, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself cannot be my disciple"

My dear friends the above quotation from today's gospel is frightening, What did Jesus really mean? Does it mean that no one can be the follower of Jesus. Let us look again at the readings this morning to decipher what Jesus is really telling us his followers today.

In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, God speaking through Moses said to the people of God that he had given them a choice between a blessing and a curse. He is giving them a choice between life and death. If they obey his commandments they will live and prosper in the land that he was going to give them. But if they choose to do otherwise, they will bring down a curse on themselves. It is a free choice, a choice that they will make out of love.

In the second reading Paul in his letter to Philemon sent his runaway slave back to him as he has become a Christian. Paul is in prison. The letter is a message he gave Onesimus to take back to his master. In it, Paul says nothing about the institution of slavery and he does call Onesimus a brother and he expects Philemon to treat him as such. In Christ now, there is neither slave nor free, since in God's eye all are one and of equal worth before him.

In the Gospel, Jesus throws a bombshell.

This is a Gospel that does not make for comfortable reading. Jesus drives home the point that becoming a follower of Jesus is not a matter of whim, it requires careful thought. Jesus was on his final journey to the Holy city when he addressed this uncompromising words concerning discipleship to the crowd pressing around him expecting a wonderful thing to happen. The parables that it contains is a call to take stock and become aware of what is going on in the world. We live in a society where emphasis is placed on prestige, power and material things. In our moral confusion we revere youth, cultivate celebrity, honour and hanker after the latest in fashion.

The Gospel today is a call for us to change our mindsets and turn our backs on much that the world loves and regards as precious. It will not come easy and may even invite ridicule and may mean the parting of the ways with former associates. The follower of Christ must absolutely clear to himself the level of commitment required of him/her. A serious disciple must prefer the

requirements of the kingdom to any claim familial relationship may impose. "If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes his own life too, he cannot be my disciple."

Jesus is not asking his followers actually to hate parents and relatives. What he is saying is that commitment to the kingdom must remain solid so that no human relationship can interfere with it.

To every serious disciple of Christ, the Lord comes first.

Following Christ requires reordering of a person's human relationship. Onesimus was a slave to Philemon, Paul took the slaver and baptised him. Paul wrote, "I am sending him back to you for ever not as a slave any more but better than a slave, a dear brother." Paul asked that the master and slave relationship between them cease to exist and be replaced by a kind of relationship worthy of brothers in Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters, this is not going to be easy at all. There will be obstacles on the way but whoever focuses on pleasing God will prosper. That is the cross we have to carry if we are to be true followers of Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen