

13A SML 2020
MT 10:37-42

Our Blessed Lord always asked for commitment clearly and confidently. He was not at all reluctant to ask men to drop everything and follow Him. Matthew, Peter, James and John, the Rich Young Man, to name just a few. “Anyone who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” (LK 14:33) Jesus demands total commitment!

That’s why three young men were spotlighted, who came to Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem and were told by Our Blessed Lord, point blank, “Follow me.” Two of them placed conditions:

- ✓ “Let me bury my father first.”
- ✓ “Let me first say good bye to those at home.”

Jesus would not hear of their conditions. “No, follow me and let the dead bury the dead. (Of course, Jesus is exaggerating to make a point. And His point is this.) You, go and proclaim the kingdom of God . . . No one who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Unfortunately for some, there is an obvious dichotomy between the faith we profess and how we live it. Although the total commitment commanded by Our Blessed Lord was met

with a conditioned commitment in return, Our Blessed Lord did not settle for what He could get. He followed up with “No, follow me.” (MT 8:22)

Today’s gospel speaks of priority. Jesus comes first. He comes before:

- ✓ Father or mother,
- ✓ son or daughter,
- ✓ and yourself,

And why wouldn’t He? He’s not saying neglect father or mother, son or daughter, or yourself. It’s a both and, but He comes first.

Today’s gospel also speaks of actions:

- ✓ Take up your cross
- ✓ Come after me
- ✓ Give a cup of water to a lowly one.

Jesus only asks you to be a total and completely committed disciple because He knows it would be the best for you. The unconditional Love of Our Blessed Lord would want nothing less than what’s best for us. What’s best is Jesus’ unconditional love for us, which we already have, and our unconditional love for Him in return. Who wouldn’t want to experience that?

So the starting point here is Jesus' unconditional love for us, but since we are talking about "our" experience, the continuing point is "our" response. Continuing with ourselves is a proposition that can lead to equivocation. How do I identify "myself?" "Myself" runs the risk of being defined by "my" own self-image and preconception, which may also be abstract.

You become completely honest, completely realistic with yourself when you watch yourself "in action." You cannot equivocate yourself from your actions. What you do is who you are. In the Old Testament. "Joshua left nothing undone that the Lord had commanded Moses should be done." (JOSHUA 11:15b) and in the New Testament, St. James tell us "A man is justified by his actions." (JAMES 2:24) Take a daily inventory of what you do, and that is who you are. Does your daily inventory of what you do, prove or disprove you are a committed disciple of Jesus Christ?

Then evaluate your actions on a scale of 0-10. When you worship Our Blessed Lord at Mass, is your worship a 2, a 5, a 9, a 10?

Evaluate this homily. When I prepare a homily, is my effort a 2, a 2, a 9 or a 10?

Evaluate your generosity. When you are generous, is your generosity a 2, a 5, a 9, a 10? etc.

This examination of conscience will help you define how you measure up with the total commitment Our Blessed Lord asks from you.

During the pandemic, I read a great book every priest should read, entitled, The Priests We Need to Save the Church by Kevin Wells. Wells' book was written in response to the infamous scandal within the priesthood that made headlines two years ago.

Wells came up with eight characteristics of priests who have kept their word (their vows). The priest with these eight characteristics is the priest he needs, the priest the world needs right now. The priest is not marked by cheap grace; there is only the call to sainthood and an impulse to help move souls toward heaven. Here are the eight characteristics. The priest:

1. Adores the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament
2. Is devoted to Mary
3. Prays devoutly
4. Assumes a victimhood
5. Is a father

6. Is persistently available
7. Preaches divine truth
8. Dives into souls at a moment's notice.

The first four characteristics allow the priest to receive God's grace. The last four are things a priest must do, actions that circle back, as I said earlier, to who a priest must be. The book was a great read that certainly challenged me to evaluate myself by taking a daily inventory of my actions, and evaluating them on a scale from 0-10.

I've mentioned another book before. It's entitled MOVE. MOVE is a book based on a survey to find out which of the many activities and programs churches offer deliver the greatest spiritual growth in their people. In other words, the survey wanted to identify which activities were most effective in helping people grow in their love of God and love of others. The results of the survey included 1,000 churches and over 250,000 congregants over a four-year period.

The results of the survey divided respondents into one of four categories. Either they're:

- ✓ Exploring Christ, or they're
- ✓ Growing in Christ, or they're
- ✓ Close to Christ, or they're

✓ Christ Centered.

Let's concentrate on the "Close to Christ" profile, as I suspect someone "Close to Christ" is where most of us would want to be, but are not quite there, let alone Christ Centered.

The characteristic that most significantly defines people who are "Close to Christ" is the high degree of ownership they take for their own spiritual journey. Unlike those who are Exploring Christ or Growing in Christ, the actions of those "Close to Christ" are not dependent on spiritual mentors, dynamic preaching or compelling scripture studies. While they believe that going to Church and being active at Church are essential to their ongoing spiritual growth, they take much of the responsibility for advancing their own relationship with Christ in addition to going to, and being active at, Church.

The take-away from this homily is for each of us to self-assess. Self-assess your actions and evaluate each of them on a scale of 0-10. That will help you know how well you respond to Jesus' call to being His totally committed disciple.

Without the action steps of being a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, "by not living as one believes, one ends up believing as one lives."ⁱ

ⁱ Robert Cardinal Sarah, [The Day Is Now Far Spent](#), p. 304.