

Have you ever heard of the City is Kinshasa?

- **Largest city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in south central Africa**
- **Kinshasa has a population of 10,000,000 people**
- **It is growing by a half a million people every year (a little less than the population of the City of Detroit).**
- **Only a few paved roads in the city; many people are malnourished.**
- **However, it is also known as the center and birthplace of some of the most creative artists and musicians in the world.**

Recently a reporter asked an artist living in the city of Kinshasa, in the midst of great poverty, what was his source of such creative energy. He answered that an artist had to have a great passion for his work. The reporter pushed a little more and asked the artist to explain what the artist meant by passion. He replied that passion included two key elements: enthusiasm and suffering.

I am afraid that as Americans, we often have great enthusiasm for our projects in life but we try to avoid suffering at all costs.

At times I find myself in touch with the enthusiasm which makes me come alive, but I soon get discouraged because I am not willing to embrace the suffering which goes along with it. Our dis-ease with suffering is like a cancer which eats away at us every day.

Take, for instance, our desire to grow in our knowledge and love for the Lord. We all want to have and full and deep relationship with God. We want our children and grandchildren to also have that deep faith. We want a deep spiritual life. I was talking with a young adult and asked him about his faith life. He said that he was spiritual but not religious. He said that he didn't really relate to any church community. What he was not facing was the fact that he wanted the enthusiasm of faith without the suffering and discipline which goes along with it.

Is this young man very different from ourselves? Many of us find it difficult to get out of bed on Sunday mornings and come to church on a regular basis. That's the suffering part! We all want the Lord to embrace us with the knowledge of his magnificent love but we don't have the time to let him speak to our hearts. We pack our daily schedule so that we do not have time to come to our Generations of Faith Sessions or Monday

Night Bible Study. We do not have the discipline to bring our children to prepare to receive the Lord in the sacraments. No, music lessons and football practice and morning cartoons fill their lives instead of preparing our hearts to receive with enthusiasm our Lord in the community of the faithful. No wonder our children wander away from the church in their teens and early adulthood. Why are we so reluctant to grow in our knowledge and love of God? They walk away because it takes suffering and discipline to be a disciple of the Lord.

That is exactly what Jesus is reminding us in today's gospel. Jesus is a good and faithful Jew. The great commandment is always before him: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone. Therefore, love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind and with all your strength.

In today's gospel, Jesus is simply asking us one question: What will be the cost of loving the Lord our God with our whole heart and mind and strength? In other words, what will it cost me to be his disciple and love the Lord passionately? Jesus answers simply that to love the Lord means that we put him and his kingdom first before our family, before our jobs, and before our possessions. He says we must "hate" our families and

possessions. In other words, we must put Jesus first before everything else because he has put us first. Or as John says, We love him because he has first loved us.

Today Jesus asks us to step back and ask one question: Do we love God passionately, no matter what suffering it brings. It is very important that we take time to consider this question if we want to grow in discipleship.

To help us ponder this question, Jesus shares two parables: the first of a man who is building a tower and a king going to war. Both men are wise because they take time to consider what it will take to complete difficult tasks. Jesus is saying that being a disciple of Christ is no easy task. We need to consider deeply what the cost and suffering may be.

Of course, we do evaluate and make important decisions every day. For instance, we take much time and care when we buy a house, or get married, or have children, or take a new job. Nevertheless, each of these brings its own surprises and new challenges, not initially considered. The same is true for committed discipleship—even after we make the informed

decision to follow Jesus, there are still many surprises on the road of discipleship.

I have a nephew who is in his forties. He has a wife and two children. But I am afraid his greatest love is fantasy football. He spends hours drafting members for his team and planning his strategies to win. His enthusiasm is extreme and his suffering when he loses is palpable. He takes all that time and effort for something which he KNOWS is a fantasy.

IN today's gospel. Jesus is reminding us that we too often live in fantasy worlds. We have hopes and dreams for members of our families which we have little control. We spend immense amount of energy earning money to gain possessions which can quickly disappear either in a house fire, or in the loss of a job or a sliding stock market.

Jesus asks us to calculate well what we are about in life. Then invites us to dedicate our hearts, minds and souls to following him and being his disciple. Simply remember one thing. While being his disciple may include a good dose of suffering and discipline, the enthusiasm and joy being his disciple is unmatched.