

## The Cost of Discipleship-March 8, 2009

*“Then Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again...If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Mark 8:31,34.*

A regular church attending single mom was having trouble out of her 12 years old son: He would bully his young brothers and sisters; complain about and trying to shirk his chores and he talked back to his parent. His mother had enough, so she took him to the family priest for counseling and waited for him in the pastor’s lounge. Fifteen minutes went by, then a half hour and finally after one hour, the young man came out in a very quiet mood.

One day went by and the young man did his chores on time, helped his younger sister with his lessons and shared the dishwashing with his younger brother. Two days, three days went by and he did the same. Finally after a week, the mother called her son to her side and said Johnny, I am so pleased with the way you have been helping out around the house lately, what happened to you last week when I took you to see the priest?

Well mom, the priest asked me why was I bullying my brother and sister; why I did not help you with the chores and why I was being disrespectful of you all of the time. I told him that I was tired of sharing every thing with those little brats that I was big enough to do anything I wanted to do and I did not have to listen to anybody. Well, said his mother, what happened next?

Well Father Jim told me to follow him into the little chapel and left me at the altar for the next fifteen minutes. He told me to get down on my knees before Jesus on that wooden cross and that Jesus would help me decide what to do with my life from then on. Well, when I look up at Jesus on that wooden cross and saw his bleeding head, the wounds in his side and his feet and hands, I finally got it. I knew that Father Jim was telling me that if I did not straighten up my life, if I did not do the right thing and if I had to come back to see him one more time, He was going to take Jesus down from that wooden cross and put me up there. Mom, I did not want that to happen to me.

Three times, Jesus told his disciples what awaited him in Jerusalem. On his way to the mount of transfiguration, with his face resolutely turned toward The Holy City, Jesus revealed for the first time to his disciples what his trip to Jerusalem was going to cost him and his father, God. He said to them *“The Son of Man, in other words the Messiah, must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.* Mark 8:31.

The irony and great shame is that the antagonism didn’t come from the usual suspects-sinners, known enemies or bad persons. It came from the leading religious and political authorities of that day. The challenges to God’s work come from the same places today. In our lives, it often comes from family and the closest friends. “Et Tu Brutus” said by Caesar and the Judas kiss are every day occurrences in any community. Never so devastating are the wounds that are often inflicted from the hands of someone close to you. However, the good news was that on the third day he would rise again. The consolation for us, as well, is that evil in the world will never have the final say. Easter morning comes after the darkness of any cruel Black Friday, for those who love the Lord.

Peter then took Jesus aside and told him in no uncurtained terms what kind of Messiah

that Peter thought Jesus should be. Upon receiving the private rebuke from Peter, Jesus called the other disciples and the crowd to his side and said to all of them, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* Mark 8:34.

Jesus knew that he would not be able to complete his work of reconciliation of humans to God alone and in his time allotted. It would soon be handed over to the his disciples, his church. If any wanted to be Jesus’ followers-which included living a righteous life, doing justly and loving mercy and doing the right thing-they had to take up their crosses daily and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Some of his disciples when they truly understood what it would cost them personally, abandoned Jesus before he got to Jerusalem. Many today do not walk the way of the cross because it is too costly. Yet, Jesus calls you and me to follow in his footsteps-to be his disciples.

Jesus then explained further the irony of discipleship. *“For those who want to save their lives will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the Gospel will save it.”* Mark 8:35. I have discovered that holding on to life in the face of compromising one’s morals or trying to save one’s life or reputation, is like trying to hold on to a hand full of dry sand. The harder one squeezes, the more of the sand slips through the fingers. There also comes a point in one’s attempt to do something where the harder one’s tries, the less productive are the outcomes. And, I have learned too that one seldom appreciates something that he/she possesses until she/he is about to lose it. So Jesus said that those who seek to save their lives will, in the end, lose their self respect, will lose the very thing they cherish or their souls. The cross of Calvary, our daily cross-carrying walk with Jesus, sometimes a loss of reputation or in extreme cases death itself, constitute the cost of discipleship.

What then are its benefits or rewards? I believe that among the rewards are

1. Self respect-an ability to look in the mirror with pride at oneself.
2. The ability to sleep at night, knowing that you have witnessed before God and others the best according to your abilities and opportunities.
3. A fruitful and abundant life with God and Jesus Christ now and in the life to come.
4. And a staving off of the growth of sin and wrong in the world as we help Jesus to make this world paradise on earth.

A man told his grandson:

*A terrible fight is going on inside of me-a fight between two wolves. One is evil, and represents hate, anger, arrogance, intolerance and superiority. The other is good, and represents joy, peace, love, tolerance, understanding, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity and compassion. This same fight is going on inside of you, inside of every person too.*

The grandson then asked, *“Which wolf will win?”*

The old man replied simply, *“The one you feed.”* ( Anonymous)

On this Second Sunday in Lent, you have a choice between two wolves. Which one will you feed? You are invited to walk the way of the cross which leads to better relationships

**among families, in communities and in the world, abundant life on earth and eternal life in the ages of ages. Feed the right wolf!**

**O God whose Son, Jesus Christ chose the path of a life of truth and righteousness which led to resurrection and life for all: Let us this Lent, not only meditate upon the cost of discipleship, but upon the glory of salvation. Let us witness daily to the truth and righteousness that reflect the morals and ethics of the kingdom of God. Let us, in our lives and witness, be so reflective of your kingdom that we and others may see and emulate your Son's righteous life. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**