

Homily: Sept. 4, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As an introduction to today's scripture readings, I want to say that it's too easy to say, "I'm Christian. I'm a baptized Catholic. I'm a believer. Do we realize that those simple statements do require prioritizing God, Jesus and Holy Spirit? However, in our daily rush-rush lives with lots of noise, problems and daily tasks, we often forget such prioritizing. So we come to our compassionate God, depending on his benevolence.

In this Gospel Jesus clarifies three prerequisites if we wish to be his disciples. However, Jesus' language for the first requirement is really challenging. "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (vs 26). This sounds unchristianly harsh because we know that Jesus was known more for his command of, "love your neighbor as yourself"—moreover, one's family members who are our dearest neighbors. As a Jew, Jesus also knew the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." He even spoke out against hatred on another occasion. He asked us to love our enemies.

So we realize that in this Gospel we can't take Jesus' word, "hating," literally. Biblical commentaries tell us that Jesus, as a man of his time, and Luke as a writer of his time, purposely used this harsh and stark language as an exaggerated attention grabber and emphasis. Jesus pushed his disciples and, now us, to ask, "What could a good man like Jesus have meant by calling for hatred—moreover, hatred for family members?"

In various ways Jesus had previously asked people to love and obey him more than anyone else. Therefore, if family members became a block to truly loving, Jesus wanted his disciple to choose his loving way rather than a family's unloving way. Today, if a family member suggests or even acts racist, want to revenge and do violence, we must choose Jesus' way and reject our family's wrong advice. We reject the advice, not the person, who right or wrong, Jesus wants us to always love—to always desire what's best for that wrong-willed person.

Secondly, Jesus demanded that his disciples, including us today, "renounce ALL possessions." Yet, I am quite sure Jesus didn't mean this literally in the sense that I have to reject or do away with all my possessions, including giving up all my clothes, even the ones I have on. Nonetheless, Jesus does mean that possessions, such as clothing, even beautiful liturgical clothing, must not get in the way of loving God and others. If dressing in my black-and-white Crosier habit or in these liturgical robes prompts me look down on you and tempts me to consider myself as more holy and better than you—then I should rethink how I live out the priesthood entrusted to me.

When I recognize that alcohol, food, gambling, porn and consumerism are ruining me, wrecking my health, and threatening my family—I must have the guts to put aside all

unhealthy use of such substances and immoral activities and ask for as much help as I need in order to stop such behavior. That's the renunciation Jesus meant.

We also have to "hate" elements of our own culture by renouncing standards and common practices that violate our total-as-possible commitment to God—namely, our commitment to love truly. When society or certain persons urge us to carry war-style guns, we must reject such instruments of animosity, violence and death and choose life-giving ways of settling problems and creating a safe living space.

We become truer disciples of Jesus by taking the above-mentioned brave steps—choosing Jesus even over family when necessary and setting aside harmful use of alcohol, food, smartphone and even clothing. Such courageous steps represent CROSSES we must be willing to carry in order to be true disciples of Jesus. Crosses are not automatically the aches and pains we happen to experience. No!

Rather, crosses are sacrificial actions we take to be faithful to love. So if I have a painful knee or a bad disease, I don't go around complaining and repeatedly trying to get all the attention and sympathy of others. Rather, I do tell those who need to know my aches and pains so that I get the help I need—and after that, I bear my physical sufferings patiently and with hope. I can choose to turn my sufferings into prayers for others.

We carry a Christ-like cross whenever we consciously and intentionally sacrifice our time, resources, talents, and skills for the welfare of others, for the welfare of our creation, for the welfare of our family, faith community and especially for the welfare of those suffering.

As Jesus said, "Those who do not carry their own cross [of love] and come after me cannot be my disciple." As disciples of Jesus we say, "In the Cross is salvation." Yes, in the cross of love is salvation.