

September 4, 2022 – Of Love and Hate (23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 14:25-33
Fr. John

The words coming out of Jesus' mouth at first seem shocking and uncharacteristic of the one whom we all assume to be God's message of love and unity. When he speaks of 'hating' those who are especially close to us and even hating our own life, it surely gets our attention. This same theme is also reiterated in John's gospel where Jesus states: 'Whoever loves his life, loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.' [Jn 12:25]

So when we find several of these teachings sprinkled throughout the gospels, they can't be dismissed as mere misquotes or mistranslations.

So what are we to make of these radical statements?

First of all, we have to be mindful of the context in which these words were spoken. Luke says that large crowds were travelling with Jesus. Many or most of them had either witnessed or heard stories of the miraculous cures attributed to this preacher from Nazareth and they wanted to see more. Curiosity and zeal to be entertained had gripped the crowds which are not unknown even within our 21st century culture which is often infatuated with the latest novelty or celebrity.

Jesus was well aware of the crowd's expectations as well as their lack of a serious commitment to what he was all about. And so he stops them in their tracks with these seemingly untenable remarks about the cost of discipleship. And that must have thinned out the crowd somewhat!

So what kind of life do we have? What part of life do we love and what part do we hate? We might be rather surprised which part is really valid. The part of life that we 'love' and are attached to is often characterized by comfort, security, complacency, and self-preoccupation. These are supplemented by our conscious or unconscious biases, prejudices and need for control. However, when these 'loveable lifestyles' are our only pursuits they eventually lead to an empty, living-on-the-surface existence.

The parts of life that we hate are usually the unpleasant and challenging ones that confront us to leave our comfort zones to change our attitudes and our lifestyles. [How often do we catch ourselves saying 'I hate when that happens!']. Paul [in our second reading] had the unpleasant task of trying to convince a close friend to receive back a runaway slave and to treat him as a beloved brother. We keep in mind that Paul was making this plea from his prison cell - hardly a place of comfort!

Ultimately, it's not the comfortable part of our lives that helps us become the best version of ourselves but rather those that disturb and force us to live a deeper and more focussed existence. These, painful as they might be, put us in closer touch with our true inner selves, our innermost needs for peace of mind and heart.

I don't think that Jesus was advocating that we deliberately go out to seek pain and suffering - that would be masochism! However these things usually find us!

Yes we all enjoy the pleasurable and more comfortable experiences that life may bring to us. I'm sure our Lord cherished and shared the joy of being with friends, basking in the delight of nature which formed the basis of many of his parables and being invited to celebrations like the wedding in Cana. But he also knew the cost of fulfilling his mission and what that cost would be to all who were serious about being his disciples.

Who of us would not admit that any advancements that we may have achieved in our lives came with some sacrifice - putting aside our comfort in order to achieve some greater good.

Perhaps when Jesus speaks to us about giving up all our possessions in order to become his disciples he wasn't necessarily speaking about material things. But rather anything that is holding us back from being fully committed to him and the gospel. And these may include biases, prejudices, and attitudes that have formed our particular comfort zones.

'For who can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills?' asks the author of the Book of Wisdom. And the answer is one that Jesus himself gives, 'Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple'.