

The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily – June 27, 2010

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One Sunday morning Preacher Jones said to his people, “Let’s pretend that the church is a locomotive. What part of the locomotive would you like to be?”

One man held up his hand and said, “I’d like to be a wheel that just helps that train roll down the track.”

Someone else said, “I’d like to be the whistle on that locomotive that sounds God’s praises through this land.”

Another person said, “I’d like to be the coal and just burn myself up for Jesus’ sake.”

At that point, the preacher broke out in a large smile and said, “Now you’re talking. We’ve got too many whistles and wheels in the church now. What we need is more coal.”

Preacher Jones was talking about commitment...the willingness to be used for God’s sake.

The pollster, George Gallup, says that his surveys reveal that fewer than ten percent of Americans are deeply committed Christians. Though forty percent attend worship on a typical Sunday, less than one in four is really committed to Christ.

There is a consumer mentality among some folks, an attitude of “I’m here to be served. What do you have for me? If you stop pleasing me, I’m gone.”

That reminds me of a beautiful woman who was married to a wealthy but elderly gentleman. One day he asked her, “Honey, if I lost all my money somehow, would you still love me? I mean, if I lost my mountain chalet, my yacht, and even my French villa, would you still love me?”

“Of course I would,” she cooed, “and I would miss you, too.”

Our emphasis today is commitment. In our Scripture lesson for today, Jesus sees the cross looming in front of him. He knows he has some sunshine followers around him whose discipleship is more than a quart low on commitment, so he

tries to teach them some hard facts of life. Jesus tells them, and us, three things about Christian discipleship.

Jesus says: “*Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.*” Jesus and his disciples could not even stay at a Motel 6 or Comfort Inn. Often they slept under the stars. Discipleship involves sacrifice and self-denial.

I’m almost embarrassed to say that out loud. Look around and tell me where you see sacrifice. Most of us ride the gravy train. Few of us have missed any meals lately except as a dieting exercise. I’m ashamed to talk about sacrifice when I’m aware of what some Christians are facing in other parts of the world. A fellow Christian is in a Sudanese prison serving a thirty-three-year sentence for evangelizing. In some Islamic countries today, you can receive the death penalty if you convert someone to Christianity. In China, Xie Moshan has spent twenty-six years in prison for illegal preaching.

All of us have seen Mormon missionaries wearing dark pants, white shirts and ties. Let me tell you more about their life-style. They do not see their families during the two years of their mission service. They are allowed to call home only on Christmas and Mother’s Day. Their workday begins at 6:30 A.M. with an hour of Bible study and prayer. Then they work until 9:30 P.M. They have about an hour to do laundry and study Scripture before lights out. This is their schedule six days a week. No TV or movies or dates for two years. We have seen men with multi-million dollar pro basketball contracts put all that on hold until they fulfill their mission obligation.

Now we Roman Catholics have some serious theological differences with the Mormons. But I can’t deny the commitment of their young missionaries. Perhaps that commitment is a key reason why their numbers are growing so rapidly. Where is the sacrifice and self-denial in our lives? Where is yours? Where is mine?

The other thing that we need to take to heart is that Jesus wants us to focus our attention on the opportunities and challenges before us. Jesus taught us that time is of the essence, for we shall not pass this way again. Every day, starting today, has its “Kingdom Tasks.”

If we are alert, we will notice the troubled person who needs a good listener, the colleague who needs an introduction to Jesus and the Church. We will see the principles that need defending and the underdogs who need befriending. Every day has its Kingdom Tasks. We must be alert to see them and faithful enough to complete them.

So there we have Jesus' guidelines for discipleship—the costs are high; the time is now; and the way is forward.

