

HOMILY

The Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary time

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One secret to being successful in the world is to learn how to motivate yourself as well as others. A tough old cowboy counseled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this and lived to be 93. When he died, he left fourteen children, twenty-eight grandchildren, thirty-five great-grandchildren and a fifteen-foot hole in the ceiling of the funeral home. So, I'm not going to suggest that you sprinkle a little gunpowder on your oatmeal, but don't we all need a little extra push from time to time to help motivate us to do the things that we ought to do?

Jesus had that difficulty with his Disciples. Jesus expected his Disciples to be totally committed. They could not straddle the fence. They could not hold onto the past at the expense of the present. He wanted them to focus on the future. *"No one who puts a hand to the plow while looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God."*

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

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 tell them some insights about Christian discipleship. Let's look at three points.

The first point is: *"The costs are high."*

Jesus says, *"The foxes have dens and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head."* Jesus and his Disciples could not stay at a Comfort Inn or Holiday Inn Express. Often they slept under the stars. Discipleship is not for the soft or the pampered. It involves sacrifice and self-denial.

I'm almost ashamed to say that out loud. Look around and tell me where you see sacrifice. I'm ashamed to talk about sacrifice when I'm aware of what some Christians are facing in other parts of the world. The evangelist Matta Boush is in a Sudanese prison serving a thirty-year sentence for evangelizing. In some Islamic countries today, you can receive the death penalty if you convert someone to Christianity. Think of our fellow Catholic Christians in Iraq who are the number one victims of violence. They must convert to Islam or pay a special tax as protection money. Even if they choose to leave, they are being threatened into leaving any unmarried daughters behind so they can be taken as wives by Muslims and forced to convert to Islam.

All of us have seen Mormon missionaries wearing dark pants, white shirts and ties. Let me tell you about their lifestyle. 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 per week. No TV or movies or dates for two years. Now I call that commitment.

If Jesus is our Lord, there ought to be some sacrifice and self-denial in our lives. Where is yours? Where is mine?

Second, Jesus said this about discipleship: *"The time is now."*

Time is of the essence. There is an urgency about **NOW!** How many times do we say that Sunday is our family day; it's time for us to catch up on our sleep; the kids are always up so late; mid-week Bible study or Familia? But it's such a rush after work. Teach? But there are others who could do it just as well. Me serve on a board or a committee? But I've done that before. Besides, somebody else can do it. Jesus taught us that time is of the essence, for we shall not pass this way again.

The third point about discipleship is: *"The way is forward."*

Most people are forever glancing over their shoulders, worried about something in the past, so mistake, some sin, some missed opportunity. Many of us Christians keep glancing back at false gods we never totally renounced.

The pastor James Moore of Texas tells about an elderly man whom he heard at a banquet. This man with a broad grin and a twinkle in his eye, said, “I know I’m old because there are three things I can’t remember: I can’t remember names, I can’t remember faces, and I can’t remember the third thing I can’t remember.”

There are three things that every Christian must forget: sins which God has forgiven, failures whose lessons have been learned, and the false gods we served before we met Jesus. Our Lord wants us to focus our attention on the opportunities and challenges in front of us. If we are alert, we will notice the troubled person who needs a good listener and the colleague who needs an introduction to our Savior. We will see the principle that needs defending and the underdog who needs befriending. Every day has its Kingdom tasks. We must be alert enough to see them and faithful enough to complete them.

So, there you have Jesus’ guidelines for discipleship:

The costs are high. The time is now. The way is forward.