

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“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.” Lk. 14:25ff

I was once in a parish and preached on this Gospel at Sunday Mass. After Mass a man approached me and said “Father, this is a little extreme, you need to tone it down a bit.”

What to make of this Gospel? Are we not supposed to love everyone? Are we not to honor our father and mother, respect our brothers and sisters? Should we not value our own life?

And yet here the Gospel speaks of hating them. Not only that, it demands that they be hated as a condition of being his disciple!

These words fly in the face of everything we know of Christianity. But these are the words not of a mad man or a raving lunatic, they are not a subjective opinion; they are the words of the founder of Christianity, Jesus himself.

Some say Jesus didn't mean 'hate' one's father, mother, brother, sister, that he really meant love God more than them. But Jesus actually used the word 'hate'.

There's no two ways about it, either he's got it wrong, or we have. Either these words are life and truth, or they are not.

Jesus is able to speak thus to his disciples, and to us who are called to be disciples, because he has experienced them in his own flesh, in his own life.

For sure there was a voice inside Jesus which said “How come your Father, who is God Almighty, allows these awful things to happen to you? How come you were born in abject poverty, put in a stable with the animals? How come you grew up in some backwater town, the son of a poor carpenter –are you not supposed to be the Messiah, the Savior? If God is your father, how come people are plotting against you, how come even your friends betray you and turn against you, why are you being crowned with thorns, scourged at the pillar, crucified?”

In those moments Jesus had to hate. To hate the projection, the idea, the preconception, the image of how his father should be. In this sense he had to hate his mother, brother, sister, and of his own life too. If he had not, he would have rebelled. He would either have gone on strike, or become violent, angry, a justice maker, correcting the perceived mistakes God was making.

The same voice speaks to us. It may say, for example, ‘How come your father was an alcoholic?’ or ‘Why was he not so affectionate with you?’ or ‘Didn't he prefer your brother to you?’ ‘How come he was not around when you needed him?’

Or the voice may say: “Why was your mother not like the other kids' moms in school? Why was your sister so mean and catty to you? Why does your brother have special needs? Why do you have these difficulties in your marriage? What's up with your kids, – they don't respect you. Look at your grandchildren, they hardly ever visit you...”

Each of us has a projection, an image of how others should be. Each of us has an idea of how our life should be.

How many family arguments occur because of sibling rivalry, or because of perceived hurts, or preferences given to others and not to us?

It leads many people to experience depression, or anger, or resentment. Unable to accept their life, their father, mother, brother, sister; unable to accept themselves –their past, their character, their flaws, their life the way it is. Much easier to project another life, to dream after another life, another father, a more understanding mother, a better sister, a kinder brother, or husband or wife or child... a better life.

In these moments Jesus had two options. Either he listened to this voice, or he hated it. We know what he did. What will we do when we hear the words of the Gospel today?

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