

***Sunday, September 8, 2019 - Fr. Ken Nolen***

I believe that most of us have heard various television advertisements that promise great things if we use certain medications. Their product will make one happier, prettier, more handsome, lose lots of weight. They will prevent scurvy, colds, flus, hepatitis, AIDS, or other conditions and diseases. The advertisements sound wonderful and very beneficial; that is until the announcer continues by describing some of the possible side effects. You may grow unwanted hair in unusual places; you may experience bone loss; you may feel hyperactive; you may have periods of excessive and uncontrolled sweating; you may experience other unwanted symptoms up to and including death! Oh yeah, I'm going to run right out and get me some of that! I don't know about you all, but they couldn't pay me to take some of those medications.

Just as most of us are shocked by the side effects described in the advertisements, the individuals listening to Jesus in today's gospel reading would have been similarly shocked by his words. It was exhilarating being in his presence, to be fed, to be healed and to listen to his new and exciting teaching. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

If he was, then things now would be better, they would have a righteous King who would establish his kingdom, free them from the tyrannical Roman rule, and set everything right. They would follow him anywhere and everywhere.

But Jesus quickly squashes their hopes. This is not the end but only the beginning. If they want to see the end, they must first become his disciples, and it is not an easy task. Along with all of the benefits, they may also experience ridicule, harsh living conditions, loss of possessions, friends, family, positions, exile, and bodily harm up to and including death by crucifixion, beheading, stabbing, and other horrible ways to die.

Hardest of all for us to understand and to apply is Jesus's warning that, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." This seems to be contrary to the fifth commandment and to Jesus other teaching in the gospels to "honor your father and mother". And the other saying, "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions," is also hard to follow. I don't know of anyone who has given up all their possessions or really hate their father and mother to become Christians.

To understand what Jesus is saying, we have to understand that Jesus use hyperbole to emphasis his teaching. He over emphasis something or goes to the extreme to make a point. Of course, although we may dislike our family at times, it really is impossible for us to hate our spouse, our children, and our family. It is impossible for us to give up everything, all of our possessions to follow Jesus. Impossible for us, but it is not impossible for Jesus. At his crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection, Jesus accomplished all, including the impossible requirements for us to become his disciples. At times, discipleship can still be hard, but not impossible, and the benefits greatly outweigh the hardships.

To fulfill all the requirements for discipleship, we only need to have one priority, that is, we allow Jesus to inform and shape who we are and what we do. Just imagine how our lives and our Christian walk would change if we would just do that one thing. It would mean that we would believe and act the same no matter where we are, who we are with, or what we are doing. It would mean that we are no longer governed by political party agendas or loyalty. We would not call each other horrendous names or tell others they are ignorant, uncaring, or seditious, but

we would be totally committed to Jesus and his gospel teaching and requirements. It is okay for us in the Christian community to have disagreements. We are going to be on opposite sides of issues that are important to each of us. However, if our first priority is to Jesus, we would not tell hurtful jokes and stories, laugh at a persons skin color, national origin, religious belief, sexual orientation, use of alcohol, tobacco, or harmful drugs. It would mean that we give up our personal opinions and preferences to love our neighbor and our enemies. Instead of being overly concerned about receiving, gaining, and hoarding, we would use our money, power, prestige, abilities, physical and spiritual gifts as resources to care for and support our family, church, and community. We would care for our planet, our earth home, as a sacred gift entrusted to our care. It means that everything we say, everything we do, everything that we are comes from and reveals our life in the love and obedience to Jesus the Christ. Still not easy, but not impossible.

However, also according to today's gospel reading, we still have to count the cost. Is being a Christian, being Jesus disciple worth it? Of course it is! So then why must we count the cost? Counting the cost of discipleship gives us backbone! Knowing

what is expected of us, knowing what our belief in Jesus could cost us, helps us to know that we can and will stand during any adversity. If we have decided ahead of time; no discussion or decision is required; we will know that we will serve Christ no matter what comes or goes. We will serve him.

This then is the crux of the topic. Have we counted the cost? Have we decided to serve Jesus even though it may cost us our life, our job, our family, our spouse, our self esteem? Have we decided that serving Jesus is more important than anything else in our lives? If it is, we will change, then we will become his disciple. Making this sort of decision is scary. But we are not alone. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will be with us. Through him God will give us the strength to stand through any and all adversities and loss up to and including death.

One of the things that the military taught me was that a hero only dies once, a coward dies many deaths. Do you want to be a hero for Christ? If you do, as we pray the prayer for forgiveness, as we receive absolution, as we take the body and blood of Christ, ask God to help you count the cost and give you the courage to be Jesus' disciple.

Amen