

13th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C"
June 26-26, 2016

"I will follow you wherever you go."

Readings: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21; Galatians 5:1,13-18; Luke 9:51-62

"I will follow you wherever you go." Today's readings focus on discipleship, a central tenet of Christians, but one that must always be properly understood. If misapplied, as history has shown, people will follow false prophets only to their own detriment, but many times to the detriment of others.

My earliest memory of trying to come to grips with the dangers of following a false leader occurred in High School, seeing the Jonestown Guyana tragedy unfold on the television news. Nearly thirty-eight years ago, a cult leader by the name of Jim Jones led a mass suicide of 900 of his followers who had moved to Guyana to practice their spin on "apostolic socialism." Hundreds left homes, quit jobs, moved their entire families to the middle of a South American jungle, moved by the teachings of a supposed prophet.

When enough concerns were raised, U.S. elected officials embarked on a fact-finding mission, and fear encapsulated the group, as members asked to leave. Shots were fired, a U.S. congressman was killed and hysteria ensued, as the leader encouraged over 900 people to take their own lives rather than have the compound shut down.

I use this story as a backdrop because to follow anyone unreservedly is quite suspect in our society. But that is a far cry from following Jesus Christ, whom we are called to follow unreservedly. The problem centers upon false prophets who claim to speak in his name. One man in today's Gospel proudly exclaims that he will follow Jesus wherever he would go; another first wished to attend to a family burial, and a third wanted to say farewell. In each case, a condition was put on discipleship and all excuses were rejected as being unworthy of total discipleship.

The examples seem harsh, especially concerning burying the dead, itself a corporal work of mercy. Perhaps extreme examples were used to illustrate the true cost of discipleship, which is increasingly seen as very high. What are our excuses, what are the limitations we put on Christ's call to discipleship? "Someday when I find the time, I will..." or "Yes," says the dad to his daughter, "I hope to see one of your soccer games soon."

The truth is, discipleship is both costly and risky. But if we are truly following the Lord, we could never be led astray as were the poor people of the Jonestown cult. We are disciples of Jesus Christ; we are linked to the Church, in full and visible Communion with others spread all throughout the world.

Discipleship entails some measure of sacrifice, but grasping just a portion of the Cross will never result in a total configuration to Christ. It is not opposed to joy and happiness. This is another fatal mistake people make. We are called to bloom where we are planted, to see that the present is our place in time and space, and that if we wait until we think all is in place, the train will have left the station without us. Our excuses will result in being left behind.

Outward sacrifice must be the expression of an interior spiritual sacrifice. The wise St. Augustine wrote: "Every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness, and thus achieve blessedness, is a true sacrifice."¹

It is not a cost too high, nor a burden too heavy. Jesus' invitation requires from us an act of trust, but in accepting it, we open ourselves to untold joy and peace in knowing that we are following the will of He who loves us unconditionally and infinitely. Lord, we will follow you wherever you go.

¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. #2009; cf. Augustine- *De civ. Dei*, 10,6.