

Sunday, February 7, 2016

The Cost of Discipleship

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020716.cfm>

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or 15:3-8, 11

Luke 5:1-11

Choosing to follow Jesus may on one hand appear to require a yes or no response. For some it boils down to simply a matter of belief. It could center on whether one believes that Jesus is, in fact, God, whether he really has shown us the way to eternal life, or whether the image of God he shows us is, in fact, true. In today's Gospel, Simon, James, and John "left everything and followed him." Why?

We get an indication that there must have been some apprehension in saying yes to this call because Jesus had to tell Simon directly, "Do not be afraid." They knew it was Jesus so this apprehension could not have come from a doubt of faith. They saw the risen Lord himself so they knew that what he said about rising from the dead is true. And during their time with Jesus they were enamored by the way Jesus spoke of his Father and the mercy, compassion, and forgiveness God desired to shower upon all his people. Why the hesitation?

I suspect that they realized that saying yes came with a price. This price is what has always been known as the "cost" of discipleship. It is all well and good to walk through life with an "oh what a friend I have in Jesus" approach to our faith as if Jesus in rewarding our good behavior will shower all these blessings upon us. It's nice to think that way just as it is nice to think about Santa Claus and the North Pole when Christmas rolls around each year. Each contains a certain amount of truth but misses the bigger picture.

These disciples were asked to go out into unknown places to preach the good news. They didn't know what they were going to find and they were afraid! They had to leave the safe and familiar and go. The world was much simpler then too. In spite of the fear generated by the intolerant leadership of the day and the unsettled defensiveness from challenged priorities, there was also a greater ease in encountering the "stranger," especially a stranger to the good news.

Our world today is tricky. We as contemporary disciples are called to realize that following Jesus requires more than just an affirmation of who Jesus is and what he has done. We need to consider, very carefully, the cost. For many, contemporary life is producing an increase in what we can call "common daily fears and anxieties." As an example, consider this reflection regarding residents of New York City and the [new type of violence many are facing](#).



These latest “slashings” and other forms of terrorism are putting people on edge, causing them to look over their shoulders, become more self-protective, trust less, feel less at home in the world, and change the way they see their relationships. To the Christian, a true follower of Jesus, we are all brothers and sisters. Where does this leave discipleship? For many, the potential cost may be too high and Jesus’ words of reassurance to not be afraid may not be enough.

The world is rapidly changing. We see this every day with the volatility of our world economies, the instability of stock markets, the rise and fall of oil prices, employment instability, and the rise of terrorism throughout the world. Even technology is changing the way we conduct our personal affairs, do business, and perform our tasks at work. It is even redefining the words “job” and “work”! Change is in the air and this already produces an unsettled feeling of anxiety and apprehension. Add to this the real possibility that my life can change at any moment. We now have a situation a bit different than the one Simon, James, and John were looking at when they got out of their boat! Maybe Zebedee was the lucky one here ... he got left behind! Now, while in many ways we can probably all agree that this is true, we also must acknowledge that, while radically different, the “cost of discipleship” is essentially the same. Their fears are essentially our fears ... it’s essentially the same church, just a different pew!

But all of this is really nothing new. Our first reading from Isaiah this weekend speaks of his call. Do you think he simply proceeded into the unknown without fear or hesitation? I think not. But in the end, who is going to do the job? Who is going to go? Isaiah listened to something other than his fears and reservations. He listened to the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” “Here I am; send me!” Have you ever felt the urge to respond to a situation and found yourself questioning whether you “should” do so? There is a voice beyond our fears and our self-concern. Do we listen to it?

Sometimes this voice beckons us in a surprisingly radical way. There was a principal of a school in Indiana who sacrificed her own life to save the children under her care. I am certain that she did not rise that morning knowing that [this heroic act would be asked of her that day](#). She did not need to respond the way she did; that came from a different place. Do we listen to that voice when we get on the subway, walk into a building, drop our kids off at school, board an airplane, go to the supermarket, participate in a marathon, or go to work? Or do we listen to the voice of fear?

Psalms 138, which is presented to us this week, and the one immediately following (139) provide us with the proper seedbed for increasing and obtaining the trust we need in God. In this way we can find the strength to pay whatever cost discipleship asks of us and the peace that allows us to embrace those tasks with joy. St. Paul does a marvelous job, as he does again this weekend, when he addresses the Corinthians; he shows us that all that Christ said and did is true! He has an incredible gift, inspired only by the Holy Spirit, of making concrete and understandable those things that are really beyond our comprehension.

Lent begins next week. Maybe pondering the cost of discipleship, the presence of fear and anxiety in our hearts, what concerns us most, what we truly believe to be important, the simple things we can do to tear down walls that divide, ways to find peace in this world God has given to all of us, and whether we are really ready to follow and become fishers of people are some possibilities for our Lenten discipline. The world is changing. We are changing. God never changes. And, as St. Paul tells us: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective.” You are reading this reflection because in one way or another you have been touched by God and have made the decision to follow him. Now, trust that decision and the God behind it and go!

Rev. Mark S. Suslenko

NOTICES

LENTEN COVERS FOR LPi PRINTING PARTNERS

LPi has created an exclusive series of bulletin covers for the Lenten season and Easter. The covers are available to LPi printing partners at no cost on our Art & Media Portal; just search keyword "[Lent 2016](#)". Lenten covers and banners are also available for purchase [here](#).

LENT AND CRS RICE BOWL

Lent begins on Wednesday, February 10, and Catholic Relief Services is again offering its successful Lenten action program, CRS Rice Bowl, to parishes. If you haven't yet ordered your supplies, or if you want to find out the very latest on the great resources available, visit: www.CRSRicebowl.org/. Bulletin resources for CRS Rice Bowl are also available on the LPi Art & Media Portal at www.Portal.4LPi.com; search keyword "[Rice Bowl](#)".

COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Church in Central and Eastern Europe on Ash Wednesday, February 10. For more information on this collection, and for parish resources to help promote it, visit: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/central-and-eastern-europe/collection/index.cfm>.

PRAYER

*Almighty and Everlasting God,
You have given the human race*

*Jesus Christ our Savior as a
model of humility.*

*He fulfilled Your Will by becoming
Man*

And giving His life on the Cross.

Help us to bear witness to You

*By following His example of
suffering*

*And make us worthy to share in
His Resurrection.*

*We ask this through our Lord
Jesus Christ, Your Son.*

Amen.

—A Prayer for Lent

To learn more about LPi's services and publications designed to help you build a vibrant parish please visit our website: www.4LPi.com

Liturgical Publications Inc
2875 S. James Drive • New Berlin, WI 53151
(800) 950-9952 ext. 2469

Send email address changes to: lpiconnections@4LPi.com

*To opt out of receiving this midweek reflection as part of your Connect!
subscription, contact: lpiconnections@4LPi.com*

Copyright ©2016, Liturgical Publications Inc. All rights reserved.