

## Twenty-third Sunday Ordinary Time

Sometimes the sayings of Jesus can be quite hard and difficult to accept such as the one today. “If anyone come to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (see Gospel reading Lk 14:25-33) In the original language of the New Testament, the Greek really does mean “hate”. Another lesser meaning could be to “mistreat” someone. However, the stronger definition really is “to hate”.

Why would Jesus, who came into this world to show us the Father’s love, talk about hating other people, especially our own relatives? Well, many scholars believe that Jesus was using hyperbole. Hyperbole is when you exaggerate something in order to get people’s attention. They believe that Jesus was exaggerating here in order to make sure that people paid attention to what He was teaching them. I believe that it would definitely get people’s attention if Jesus told them that they had to hate their mother, father, spouse, children, brothers and sisters, even themselves in order to be His disciple. These are the people that we should love. After all, one of the ten commandments is to honor your father and mother. Wouldn’t Jesus be breaking this commandment?

No, Jesus is driving home a point here. We are to love Jesus first and foremost before any other person. This may have seemed pretentious to those that heard Him say this, especially for those that hadn’t come to know Jesus as God. Thinking Jesus to be a mere human, it would have been quite insulting. To the Jewish person of the time, he would have known that only once before had someone demanded that He be loved above all else. In Deut. Ch. 6 Moses commanded the Israelites to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” God alone could command that He be loved above everything and everybody else. After all, God is the Creator and sustainer of life. So, here we have Jesus basically demanding the same thing, to love and prefer Him before anybody else. This should make sense to us because we already believe Jesus to be God. But to the first century Jew it would have been scandalous to hear this.

It can be difficult for most of us to love Jesus above every single thing and person. What I just said may seem insulting to some people. However, Jesus could probably very easily point out things or people that we are strongly attached to. Should I begin with the Seahawks? Any diehard Seahawk fans here? Or whatever sports team that you root for. Would you be willing to give up completely your devotion to this team and dedicate all that time that you spend watching and rooting for your team in prayer to Jesus instead? Can you see how difficult this might get? Jesus knows what we are strongly attached to. Jesus is able to look into our hearts to see what we desire and love a little too much.

There is a cartoon called “Dilbert” that might help to illustrate this. If you aren’t familiar with the comic strip called Dilbert, it is about life at the office and the many characters that work at that office. One of these characters is a woman who is continually late for the morning meeting. One of her co-workers decides to challenge her. The comic strip starts off with the woman saying, “Sorry, I’m late. Traffic was terrible.” The co-worker asks, “Isn’t traffic from your house always terrible this time of day?” The woman says, “Exactly. That’s why I’m late every day.” The co-worker coaxes her along, “Do you see any way you could fix that?” The woman says, “Well, I can’t control traffic.” The co-worker responds, “You could leave earlier.” The woman says, “Then I wouldn’t get enough sleep.” The co-worker asks, “You could go to bed earlier.” The woman responds, “Then I wouldn’t be able to watch Netflix until two in the morning.” There is an uncomfortable pause before the woman responds, “Do you want me to hate my life?” The co-worker sighs, “I didn’t until now.”

Comics are made to make us laugh. And we laugh primarily because we can see our own human frailty in them. Here, the woman’s own behavior was causing her to be late for work every day. However, she was not willing to change anything in her life. She thought that changing something, or giving up something, would

cause her to hate her own life. Or one might say that she lived for these worldly things. She couldn't imagine living without them, even if they were detrimental to her work. How many of us would be able to say the same thing about something in our life? "I couldn't imagine living without this. Whatever this might be. I believe that God could easily point out what these worldly things are that we are attached to a little too much.

There is a movie that is about 40 years old by now. It is called "*The Jerk*" by Steve Martin. Towards the end of the movie the character that Steve Martin is playing, the Jerk, has just lost his fortune in a lawsuit and is being evicted from his mansion. He is very depressed about losing everything. He gets into an argument with his wife, and as he is walking out of the mansion he says, "I don't need anything. I'll show you. I don't need anything at all." And as he is walking by his desk, he looks at it, picks up the ashtray and says, "Except this ashtray. I need this tray." He takes a few more steps, he sees a paddle ball game, and he says, "I need this paddle ball game too. All that I need is this ashtray and this paddle ball game." He walks a little further and he does the same thing with some matches and the remote control and a small lamp and a chair. As he walks further away, he says, "That's all I need are these things. I don't need anything else.

I know that there are many people that have downsized to a smaller home. Do you remember how difficult it was to decide what to keep, and what to give away? You go into your garage and open boxes that have been stored there for thirty years. "I forgot what is in this box? Oh, we need to keep this. I can't live without this. I'm sure that as soon as I give it away I will need it tomorrow." It's not easy to let go of some things, is it?

Why is Jesus so demanding? It's as if one might say, "Can't Jesus just leave me alone and let me enjoy all of my things? After all, that is why I got them in the first place, so that I could enjoy them. Go Seahawks! Is Jesus trying to take all the enjoyment out of my life?" No, He isn't. He is trying to get our priorities straight. None of those worldly things will get us into heaven. Only Jesus can do that. The opening prayer for Mass today is very appropriate. It goes, "O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance." May we love Jesus above all things and people. Only in doing this will we know true freedom and come to that everlasting inheritance that is promised for those that are willing to become true and faithful disciples of Jesus.