

Homily 2019.09.08 by Fr. Gabor (23-C6)

When I was a parish priest in Inverurie and Alford years ago I came across a beautiful PowerPoint presentation which was telling you that Jesus doesn't want admirers, which means that Jesus doesn't want the praise of those who only follow Him in order to hear nice talks and see miracles, but have no intention to take His teaching on board and build their lives upon it. Basically He doesn't want to be a celebrity; an entertainer for the public who enjoy His performance for a while and as soon as He finished they go home and His teaching and miracles have no effect on their lives. As the Gospel reading says great crowds followed him. But there were a lot of admirers in these crowds. Perhaps this is why he forbade witnesses to talk about His miracles. Celebrity culture is ripe in our society as well, just look at some TV programmes, which draw more followers than all the other TV programmes put together.

There were also a lot of followers in the crowds that went after Jesus. Although they did more than just admiring Jesus, they kept going everywhere where Jesus went. They are today's Paparazzies, but this is still only a passive way of relating to Jesus. There is no commitment involved in following Jesus everywhere; you just simply follow him and watch what he is doing or saying. So to be a follower is still like being a duck, which merely follows wherever its mum goes, without putting much thought into it. Going to church can be a mere cultural thing, or a tradition, without having any **real** commitment to Christ.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus goes further and says: do not be mere admirers or followers, but be disciples. The word 'disciple' comes from the Latin 'discipulus', which means 'learner'. In Jesus' understanding discipleship is about a radical, lifechanging **commitment** to know Him and His life, to go wherever He goes and to do whatever He tells you (cf. John 2:5; Luke 9:35), and therefore Jesus clearly requires detachment from other people, realism, sacrifice and battle.

He requires detachment from other people when he says: 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother... he cannot be my disciple.' He also requires detachment from our desire for a comfortable lifestyle, which sounds alien to many people today, but Jesus says: 'anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'

He requires realism, which means he wants those who want to become disciples to be aware that they will have to pay a high price for being His disciples, and not have any illusions about Christian life. You know when we face difficulties because of our Christian faith and commitment to Christ, these are the times when you realise

how much it costs to be a **disciple** of Christ. Unfortunately many Christians fail the test when they have to make a big sacrifice of discipleship, because their thinking and attitude are conditioned by modern society, which strives to eliminate suffering and commitment, and promotes quick and cheap solutions to challenging life situations. Therefore many of us tend to convince ourselves that real sacrifices are not necessary and end up compromising our faith and making lukewarm sacrifices.

As with regards to battle as part of discipleship, when a true disciple wants to build His life upon Jesus' teaching and wants to make real, sometimes radical changes if necessary, it is inevitable that our spiritual enemy will strike to make your conversion unsuccessful, and will use its weapon of putting fear of radical changes into your hearts and minds, and will employ many other tricks. Therefore a true disciple who doesn't want to give in to these tricks of the evil one has to take up the battle against its temptations. This is why Jesus in today's Gospel about discipleship refers to a battle between two kings, which symbolise the evil forces and ourselves. But He warns that you can win against the more powerful king, which is the evil one, if you empty yourself so much that you come to the point that you have nothing to lose. This is what Jesus does on the cross. He gives up all his possessions, even His own life (cf. John 10:18).

So all in all Jesus tells the crowd: stop being mere admirers or followers, or Christian Paparazzies! You are kidding yourselves if you follow me without any radical commitment to me. But rather be disciples; Christians who radically commit their lives to me; who carry their crosses every day, not just occasionally; who are willing to pay a high price for building their lives (their towers) in the direction of Heaven, and are ready even to die in your spiritual battle with your spiritual enemies, because only when you lose your life and start living in me you will receive your real life in me, because your real life is hidden in me (cf. Mt 10:39; Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35; Col 3:3).