**Homily for the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A**

**June 28, 2020**

**St. Bavo Parish**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

*First Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a (Elisha is received as a holy man of God.)*

*Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89 (Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.)*

*Second Reading: Romans 6:3-4, 8-11 (You were baptized into the death of Christ.)*

*Gospel: Matthew 10:37-42 (The demands of discipleship.)*

Imagine that you were considering joining an organization, and when you inquired about the qualifications for membership, you were told that all members must be willing to suffer pain, torture, humiliation and death for the sake of the Founder. You might have second thoughts about joining that group.

Apparently, Jesus was not terribly concerned about the *number* of disciples he attracted; he was much more concerned about their *dedication* to him and to the mission. He wanted disciples who were *worthy* of him. If lots of people wanted to follow him around and listen to his sermons… great, let them come. But, the ones that he would send out on mission had to be totally committed. After all, they would be his ambassadors to the world, representing Jesus wherever they went. Jesus told them, “Whoever receives you receives *me*, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” In other words, the Apostles would speak and act in *Jesus’ name* and by *his authority*, just as Jesus spoke in the name of his heavenly Father and acted with his authority. In order to fulfill that mission, the Apostles had to be the right kind of people to begin with, and they had to understand what was expected of them.

This gospel passage concludes Jesus’ instructions to his Apostles as he sends them out to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Keep in mind that he has just recently selected them from among his vast crowd of followers. These twelve men have been set apart for much greater responsibilities, for which they must be mentally and spiritually prepared. So, Jesus makes his expectations very clear. First, he insists that they carry nothing with them on their journey. Then, he warns them about the obstacles that they are bound to encounter – opposition, persecution, etc. But, Jesus suggests that true disciples should welcome such mistreatment, because it will make them more like their Master. After all, the goal of every disciple is to become like his master in all things. For Jesus’ disciples, that includes suffering for the sake of righteousness, as he did.

After giving those instructions, Jesus then continues with the warnings that we heard today. Although it’s understandable that Jesus would have high standards for his disciples, these demands sound quite extreme: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me *is not worthy of me*, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me *is not worthy of me*; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me *is not worthy of me*.” Really? They have to love Jesus more than *their own parents and children*? That’s a lot to ask. And they have to be willing to suffer *crucifixion* for him? Most of them probably thought that Jesus was exaggerating. At this point, none of them could imagine that Jesus himself would be crucified. Surely, they didn’t think that they would. But, of course, we know that most of the Apostles *did* suffer martyrdom for Jesus’ sake, and a few followed in his footsteps even more literally, dying on a cross as he did.

With the exception of Judas Iscariot, the Twelve proved themselves worthy of their Master. They *earned* the titles of “disciple” and “apostle.” By contrast, we have been *given* those titles simply by virtue of our baptism. In addition, we bear the name of “Christian,” not just because we *believe* in Christ, but because we have been baptized into his death. As St. Paul explains, “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” So, the question for us modern-day disciples and apostles is, “How much of those demands that Jesus placed on the Twelve also apply to us?” If we are so intimately bound to Christ, what must *we* do to be worthy of him?

I’m afraid the answer is that *everything* Jesus said to the Twelve also applies to us. After all, we’re much more like the twelve Apostles than we’re like the rest of the people who followed Jesus around from place to place. Jesus demanded *nothing* of the crowds. Those people could come and go as they pleased. They could listen to a sermon or bring someone to be healed, and then they could forget about Jesus and go back to their other pursuits. The Twelve were different. They were committed. They had joined themselves to Jesus for the rest of their lives, *as have we*. Our baptism into the Christian faith was a lifelong commitment, joining us to Christ from that day forward. As part of the baptismal ritual, we were anointed with Sacred Chrism and told that we share in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. In other words, we were being sent out into the world to be his representatives, just like the Apostles before us. So, it’s only fitting that the demands placed on them should also be placed on us.

To be worthy of the Lord, whose name we bear, we must love him more than our parents, our children, our spouses, or any other human being. And, it goes without saying that we must prioritize the Lord’s service above any other desire. In short, *Christ must be the center of our lives*. That’s a lot to ask of us, just as it was a lot to ask of the Apostles. I suspect that the true cost of discipleship did not become clear to them until they had been serving the Lord for a while and had begun to experience some of the challenges that Jesus predicted. Likewise, we discover the true cost of discipleship over time, as we grow in faith and encounter the struggles that come with it. Our baptism is only the beginning, especially for those of us who were baptized as infants. As we mature, we discern what *more* the Lord is asking of us, besides just living a good, Christian life. That in itself is a challenge, but the Lord always asks more. He invites us to *follow* him, to *emulate* him, to *proclaim* him, and to *represent* him. That is the great honor that has been given to us as Christians. By declaring, “I am a Christian,” we are saying, “When you see me, you see Christ; he lives in me, and I in him.” When we consider the vast implications of that statement, we realize that we really *do* need to be worthy of him. We must be willing to love him above anyone and anything else. And we must be willing to take up our cross, whatever that may be, and follow him.