

13th Sunday A (Matt 10:37-42)

“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,” Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel. Hey, what about the fourth commandment and honoring mother and father? What about family values and taking care of our kids? There’s nothing wrong with loving one’s father or mother. On the contrary, by honoring our parents we satisfy the fourth commandment. Moreover, Exodus 21:17 states that those who curse their parents should be put to death. Scripture is clear that we ought to revere those who gave us life.

Harsh as they may seem, Jesus’ words are about a distorted parent-child relationship, one in which the adult child never grows up or takes personal mature responsibility because he or she is tied to parental demands, expectations or world view. In effect, some adults never leave home, even if they live at a geographical distance from their family of origin and have a family of their own. To leave parents means to be capable of making choices and taking actions for which we will assume responsibility. Couples preparing for marriage sometimes encounter this problem. Sometimes the engaged couple must recognize the effects that lack of family acceptance, family interference, or the rejection or criticism of the partner’s family can have on their relationship. Sometimes we encounter the old “mother-in-law problem,” or the “father-in-law problem.” Instead of trying to please one’s parents at any cost, a time comes for each of us when it is necessary to follow our heart. Unless we grow up emotionally, we cannot be the disciples Jesus calls us to be.

What Jesus calls for in our Gospel today is a supreme devotion that exceeds our devotion to father or mother, son or daughter and to all other families or friends. He asks for our heart. He asks nothing of us that he did not first require of himself. “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.” The cross became a literal reality in his life. He saw it coming, but he wouldn’t turn aside nor back away. So they crucified him for loving too deeply, for caring too much, for speaking too plainly and truthfully. And by his death he has transformed the cross into a symbol of self-sacrifice as the only way of redemption. That’s what Jesus did for the whole world; and that is what he is calling on you and me to do. The condition of our world is tragic and its needs are profound. The ruin of sin is disastrous as we consider ISIS, the political deception in the world, the violence that infects our country and countries around the world. The cost of redemption is great. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and come after him. It is the only thing that will make any difference. Help us to put you first, Lord, that we may be worthy of you.

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