

## **TOTAL DEDICATION NEEDED TO FOLLOW THE LORD.**

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Matthew 14:26).

Dear brothers and sisters, this declaration sounds harsh and it appears that it is not from our Lord himself. Could it be that the Lord is saying that if you are going to be his disciple that you must hate other human beings, especially those nearest to you, like your family and friends? No, it cannot be. This is because the greatest commandments given by our Lord himself is to love. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Mark 12:30). The second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). In order that we may not be in doubt about the commandment to love, the Lord clearly said, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (John 15:12).

What then does the Lord mean when he said, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Matthew 14:26). Dear brothers and sisters, we look for the meaning in the original language in which the New Testament was written. Remember that the New Testament was written in Greek. Often when one translates from one language to another, there is something of the fire and nuance of the original language that is either lost or toned down. The Greek word used in our passage here for hate is *miseo*, which is a comparative verb meaning love less, esteem less. It denotes to love someone or something less than someone or something else, i.e. to renounce one choice in favor of another. Hence, the proper translation would be that if you love your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even your own life more than the Lord you are not worthy to be a disciple of the Lord. The Lord is, therefore, not commanding us to hate our parent or any other person for that matter. Rather, he is asking us to keep the proper order of love. In other words, to love other things in relation to God who, is the source of all things. The message of this passage is a reminder of the total dedication necessary for the disciple of Jesus. No attachment to family or possession can stand in the way of the total dedication needed to be a true disciple of the Lord.

God is the first and last, there is no one like him. God is not one option among many equal options. He is the ground of existence itself. Without him, nothing exists or can exist. This means that we cannot give him second place in the order of love in hearts. The Holy Spirit warned us through the words of Psalms of the danger that arises when we let something else other than the Lord to become a priority in our lives. He says,

In his riches, man lacks wisdom: he is like the beasts that are destroyed. This is the lot of those who trust in themselves, who have others at their beck and call. Like sheep they are driven to the grave, where death shall be their shepherd and the just become their rulers. With morning their outward show vanishes and the grave becomes their home (Psalm 49:13-17).

Having wealth is not necessarily a bad thing but, when one's life is consumed by only making and spending money then one has not given God the centrality and priority he deserves in one's life. Something is seriously wrong. How did our ancestors in faith deal with this? The life of early Christians recorded in the Acts of the Apostles gives us an example of freedom from possessions and unnecessary attachment to worldly things. That enabled them to be like Christ and to follow him wholeheartedly. The Word of God says,

All who believed were together and have all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divided them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all people (Acts 2:44-46).

The other aspect of the message of total dedication needed for discipleship which, our Lord gave in our gospel passage is that, "Whoever that does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Matthew 14:28). What does carrying the cross mean? It means living a life completely dedicated to doing the will of the Father and thereby bringing about the Lord's work of redemption to the world. What could interfere with this mission is attachment to one's own selfish ends. Doing the will of God in the world filled with contrary messages, trends and mindsets is swimming against the current. Reliance solely on our own resources does not help. We need, according to St Gregory, to do one thing that is necessary, and that is to ask the Lord for help because without him we can do nothing. We ask by the way of tears, works of mercy and propitiatory victim. Sometimes, the world looks on Christians as foolish for following the way of the cross. The truth however, is, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1Corinthians 1:18).

What are the inordinate attachments that I need to renounce in order to have the freedom to walk in the footsteps of Christ my Lord, carrying the cross of redemption? If you look into your lives you would see the attachment that comes between you and God.