

The Sure Footed Disciple

Homily for August 18, 2019

A teenage girl at summer camp was torn between two sets of friends. Some of them were sunbathing on the dock, saying to her "stay with us." But her other friends were in a rowboat saying "no, come with us." There she stood, one foot on the dock, the other foot on the edge of the boat, and the boat was moving. Trying to appease everyone, trying to not decide, she ended up falling into the water.

This is the theme addressed in our readings for today. The Scriptures teach us today that there will be times when following Jesus will require us to turn away from something else. There will be times in this life when we will be required to say "yes" to one thing, and therefore "no" to the other. And of course, the action we most often take is the same one that girl did on the swimming dock. We try to go in both directions. We try to say "yes" to it all, and we end up falling in between the seams, and being miserable.

What the Church invites us to consider today is to live as sure footed disciples. There are many people who believe in God and affirm that Jesus is the Son of God. However to choose the way of discipleship is to not only believe in God but to give our yes to him as we discipline our choices by choosing to follow him.

The Collect said at the beginning of Mass is the prayer of a disciple.

O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire.

To live as a disciple of Jesus is to know that the unseen world is of greater importance than the world we see. To be sure footed is to experience the warmth of his love in our hearts. The other day I had such a sense of this warmth when we celebrated the Solemnity of the Assumption. At Mass on Thursday I was filled with an awareness of the Lord's love as Fr Arjay celebrated the Mass, Fr Terry joined with Deacon Stephen and me and members of our Parish Family to honour our Blessed Mother. Have you had a similar experience, say at Mass, or in another context, where your heart has been warmed with an experience of God's love?

When we know we are loved, it in turn inspires us to love. This is particularly so in our relationship with God. For you see discipleship is above all else about a deepening relationship of love between God and us, where we choose to love him in all things and above all things.

People who have exhibited through their lives the theme of the Collect are the Saints who increasingly chose in a world of competing demands to give their yes to Jesus. This is why in our reading from Hebrews we are reminded of the cloud of witnesses who in going before us are to inspire us on to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. To keep our eyes fixed on Jesus requires a concentration and focus where we are also aware of what Hebrews describes as "the weight of sin that clings so closely".

What is this sin? In Hebrews it finds a particular definition. Back in chapter 2 the weight of sin that clings so closely is expressed in a cautionary manner:

we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ¹

Then in chapter 10 it is articulated this way::

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ²

Here two types of people are described. The sure footed disciple is the person who holds fast to the confession of hope without wavering – that which has been heard – as Hebrews 2 expressed it; the disciple is the person who stirs others to good works, encouraging one another. The one who is drifting away, like an unmoored boat, gets out of the habit of Mass attendance and connection to the local Church and thereby falls away. They can become indifferent, apathetic and even opposed to the message of Jesus Christ. How easy it is for this sin to cling so closely.

But for the disciple he or she wants to shed this weight by recalling those who have gone before us have persevered. Most importantly we look to Jesus Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. The faith is not of our creation but originates in Jesus and is completed by Jesus as we cooperate with him. It is as we meditate on the example of his life, as we receive him believing in His Eucharistic Presence that he in turn can renew us with the warmth of his love so that we do love him in all things and above all things.

However we need to aware of those forces the can discourage us to persevere in the faith. Such a story of discouragement is told in our Old Testament reading for today. Jeremiah, who lived 600 years before Jesus was a man who had been called from his birth to live as a disciple. Because he lived with such whole hearted commitment in his relationship with God and spoke words his contemporaries didn't want to hear he was put into a cistern to die He was accused of not seeking the nation's welfare but harm. In the end he is saved from death but had to live with the harsh criticism of those who could not accept his radical commitment towards God.

Even more difficult can be the discouragement that makes discipleship a challenge because of family pressures. Jesus is so clear in what he says in today's Gospel – when people in a family put following Jesus as their priority there will be divided households.

¹ [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Heb 2:1). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

² [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Heb 10:23–25). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

St. Ambrose was the bishop of Milan, a Latin-speaking Church Father in the 4th Century who played a key role in the conversion of St. Augustine. And in St. Ambrose's Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, this is what Ambrose says about Jesus' teaching heard today:

Are we to believe that Jesus has commanded discord within families?... He does not say that a father is to be rejected by his children, but that God is to be set before all... You are not forbidden to love your parents, but you are forbidden to prefer them to God. Natural children are true blessings from the Lord, and no one must love the blessing that he has received more than God by whom the blessing, once received, is preserved.³

In other words, Ambrose is saying that nothing can take precedence over the call to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, even if it results in misunderstandings in families by those who cannot accept our wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ.

May we not be like the teenage girl at summer camp, indecisive to whom we listen; rather, may we in keeping our eyes on Jesus stir one another up to love and good works as we love Jesus in all things and above all things and so attain God's promises and sharing one day fully in Christ's victory, that as our collect says, surpasses every human desire.

To live like this will give us the balance to live as sure footed disciples of Jesus Christ.

³ Ambrose, Exposition on the Gospel of Luke 7.134-36; trans. T. Tomkinson [adapted]