

Pope Benedict XVI said of the Sermon on the Mount:

***“The Sermon on the Mount is addressed to the entire world, the entire present and future, and yet it demands discipleship and can be understood and lived out only by following Jesus and accompanying him on his journey.”<sup>1</sup>***

To be a disciple is far more than being a believer. Many people believe in Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is someone who wants to really follow in the way of Jesus. The word comes from the Latin: *discipulus* and means a student, learner and follower.

In this evening’s Gospel we learn three things about discipleship.

It is a precious gift.

It is to be expressed in genuine love

It is a difficult path to follow.

Discipleship is a precious gift because it is so closely associated with the Holy things of God. Jesus speaks about the precious nature of discipleship when he says:

***Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.***

First we have to identify **what is holy** and what is meant by **pearls**. In the Bible, something *holy* is set apart for God, usually for the service of divine worship. Pearls, for their part, were highly prized in the ancient world and were sold on the commercial market as women’s finery (1 Tim 2:9). Jesus indicates in a later parable just how valuable they were deemed to be (13:45–46).

Next we have to interpret Jesus’ reference to **dogs** and **swine**. Dogs were generally despised in the world of Palestinian Judaism. Only rarely—and not in the land of Israel—do we see them as domesticated pets (Tob 6:2; 11:4). Dogs normally lived as scavengers; they were wild, dirty, unloved, and dangerous. Pigs, in the Jewish mind, were even worse. Quite apart from their filthy habits, they were unclean animals in a religious sense, for the dietary laws of the Torah declared pork unfit for Jewish consumption (Lev 11:6–7; Deut 14:8).

Therefore we want to be careful with whom and how we share our life of discipleship. There will be those who will not appreciate the beauty of the faith and like these wild beasts would denigrate and desecrate the Gospel. Therefore we need to be discerning with whom and how we share the faith.

But even though others may by their lives profane the faith and even profane us, we are not to act in such a way. At the heart of what it means to be a disciple is to live out the golden rule.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitch, C., & Sri, E. (2010). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 122). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.<sup>2</sup>*

In other words we are to treat all people with dignity and respect because this is a summary of biblical morality that found similar expression in the Old Testament and ancient Judaism. Even if they are like the dogs and swine referred to earlier, even though they do not respect us, we need to respect them. Jesus gives us a very clear directive as to how we do this. Think of how you would want to be treated, and treat them that way.

Such a path of discipleship is a difficult one to follow.

*“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”<sup>3</sup>*

We are always living in a world where we need to make choices. In the Bible there is constantly a reference to two ways. This is a black-and-white view of human conduct that directs attention to the final outcome of our decisions. We either decide to follow God’s way or we follow our own way, and there is a great difference between the two.

Disciples are urged to be among the **few** who squeeze through the **narrow gate** that **leads to eternal life**. No doubt Jesus is telling us that determination and acceptance of life’s difficulties are necessary to reach this end, for the entryway is tight and a concerted effort is required. Because the **road** itself is **constricted**, there is the need for sustained moral focus, lest we veer off course by making choices that lead in the other direction.

The way we keep focused is to always remember the holiness we are called to exhibit as disciples in an unholy world and to treat others as we would want to be treated. If daily we live this way we will be accompanying Jesus on his journey and enter through the narrow gate.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Mt 7:12). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Mt 7:13–14). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.