

SEPTEMBER 8, 2019
Sunday of the 23rd Week in OT
Lk. 14: 25-33

LORD, YOU ARE MY ALL

In one of his homilies, Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, a pastor in New Jersey, shared about the experience of a wonderful priest Fr. John Fullenbach in India. "Fr. John Fullenbach is a renowned theologian who taught in Rome. He related how he contacted Mother Teresa's sisters in Calcutta and asked if he could join them for a few weeks between semesters at the seminary. They welcomed him to join their work. He flew to Calcutta, found the Missionaries of Charities' hospice, and had just finished telling the sister in charge that he was willing to do anything they needed to be done, when another sister came running in saying that there was a man dying on the streets. The sister in charge turned to him and said, "Father, could you please go with her and bring the man back here to the hospice?" Fr. John followed the sister through the back alleys of Calcutta, in and out of narrow streets, and finally came upon what looked from the distance to be a mountain of dirty rags. It was the dying man. Fr. John bent over him and tried to comfort him and told him that he was going to take him to a nice, clean place where he could be cared for. The man opened his eyes; saw that it was a priest talking to him, and spit in his face. The priest felt a rage rising within him. He was a distinguished professor. He came all the way from Rome to India to help these people. And this man responded by spitting on him. The sister explained that most of the people on the streets are not Catholic, but we still need to care for them. So, Fr. John picked the man up and carried him back to the hospice where the man was cleaned, given fresh clothes, fed a bowl of soup, and put on a bed to die with dignity. The sisters then asked Father to help by rolling up some clean strips of cloth that could be used for bandages. He was doing this for about an hour, rolling the strips, and still feeling upset over the man spitting on him. Suddenly the whole hospice shook with the screams of a little girl. On the other side of the room there was a poor

little girl, about nine, and covered in sores. She was standing in a basin of water as one of the young sisters was trying to clean her, bathe her sores. The little girl was enraged, hysterical, kept screaming and kicking and splashing the sister. Father John was watching this horrible scene when he noticed everyone looking at one of the doors. It was Mother Teresa. She started walking to the little girl. "Well," Fr. Fullenbach thought, "Now we'll see what a saint is made of." As she approached the little girl, she waved the young sister away. The girl saw her and kept screaming, and then began splashing Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa kept walking towards her, very slowly, with a smile of love on her face. By the time she got to the girl, she was drenched, but she didn't seem to mind. Instead, she just kept smiling. Then she held out her arms. The child fell into them and just cried and cried. Mother Teresa let her cry for as long as she wanted. Then the little girl let Mother Teresa wash her and put clean clothes on her. Fr. Fullenbach said to himself, "And that is what a saint is made of." Nothing is more important than serving God. Not our stuff, not our likes, not our perceived position among our peers, not even the people in our lives. We cannot allow anything to stand in the way of our being disciples of Jesus Christ.

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In our gospel for today, Jesus Christ is teaching us how to follow Him even to "hate father and mother, spouse and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even our lives itself." What He meant by this? Our Lord Jesus Christ is not telling us to disregard God's Fourth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother" nor telling us not to see God in others. He is using an image to illustrate with strong language the demands of being His disciples. To be His disciples means to hate anything and anyone that causes us to lose our focus, our attention, our concentration on Him. We need to throw insignificant things and put God first.

My brothers and sisters, what are the things that are tearing us away from whom we need to be. Most of times, we make hard choices and decisions. Maybe we need more rest, more sleep and less time before a television screen, computer, tablet or phone or movies. We need more quality time for our family, less office and school commitments or any other activities that keep us far away from what are essential and from those who need our love. The love of God obliges us to choose who or what will be first in our lives. To place any thing or any persons or relationship or any possession above God is a form of idolatry – putting created things above the Creator. We are now being challenged by Jesus to examine who and what we love first and foremost. We have two choices: mastered by many different things - money, drugs, success, power, fame, or the Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who set us free from the power of sin, greed, and destruction. The choice is ours; do we choose the path and destiny the Lord Jesus Christ is offering us or the path in opposition to God's will and purpose for our lives? It is between life and death, truth and falsehood, goodness and evil. But there is a guarantee if we choose and put our trust in Jesus Christ, He will lead us to the path of true joy and happiness with God our Father in heaven.

Going back to the story of Fr. Joseph and Fr. John, let us ask the intercession of St. Teresa of Calcutta that we may have the spiritual strength, perseverance and love to be faithful disciples of the Lord. Also, as we celebrate the Nativity, the birthday of Our Blessed Mother Mary today, let us ask Her to show the way to Her Son. She is the greatest example of a true disciple of Jesus.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, you are my greatest possession, my life, and my everything. Guide me, help me and lead me to know the path of true discipleship. May I love you and serve you through my family, friends and neighbors. Take my life and all that I have and make it yours for your glory now and forever. Amen."