

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 7/8, 2019 – Reflection

" ... What king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

The Gospel of Luke in the 14th Chapter

General James Mattis is a Marine with a reputation for toughness, as evidenced by his various nicknames: "Warrior Monk"; "Mad Dog"; and "Chaos". As a general, Mattis led the Central Command in the Gulf region from the years of 2010 to 2013. More recently, General Mattis was the United States Secretary of Defense in the Trump administration throughout 2017 to 2018 before resigning in December of last year.

General Mattis has just come out with a new book called, appropriately enough, *Call Sign Chaos*, wherein he talks about U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf region, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The United States has been involved in armed conflicts and all-out wars in that part of the world for the best part of thirty years now. Victory has been declared more than once. "Mission Accomplished" has been proclaimed from the deck of an aircraft carrier by the Commander-in-Chief himself. Troop levels

have been reduced and then built up again many times. Various enemies have been vanquished: Al Qaeda; the Taliban; ISIS; Saddam; Osama Bin Laden; but as each is laid to rest, another rises up to take its place like an endless game of Whack-a-Mole.

Thirty years ... and still no end in sight. General Mattis remarked recently in an interview that I heard that the United States was well-prepared to win all these wars but devoted little time, energy, planning, or money to winning and keeping the peace and that, in a tragic nutshell, is why there has been thirty years of constant war and terror and loss of life.

At your Baptism, your parents who brought you to those sacred waters were asked if they were prepared to bring you to know Christ, to train you in the practice of the faith. They answered, "Yes," they understood what their mission was. In the anointing of Confirmation, you were asked if you believed in God the Father, His Son Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit who would fill you with divine gifts. You responded, "Yes, I believe." You were asked if you believed in the Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. You responded resoundingly, "Yes," and you were commissioned as a soldier of Christ and sent out onto the battlefield of life to fight against the forces of evil armed with faith, hope, and love.

In those promises we made at Baptism and Confirmation, we were off to a great start and our zeal to follow our Commander and Lord, Jesus Christ, was strong. With St. Peter, we pledged, "Even if the others desert you, I would never! I would die for you!" But many of us have been unwilling to pay the price, our courage has flagged, our

commitment softened, we want to leave the fight to others, and sit back and rest on our laurels.

Jesus knew what this battle would demand, how much it would cost. The battle has been engaged. The armies of the Lord are marching but what will it take from you, in you to win the eternal peace? It will cost everything you have, everything you are, it will cost the cross.

"Unless ye be willing to take up your cross daily and follow after me, you cannot be my disciple."