

# ‘To be my disciple you must hate your family and your life’

**Bishop David McGough** 2 September, 2010

“If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.”

The words addressed by Jesus to his disciples are deeply disturbing. This was their intention. Jesus had wanted his disciples to understand the radical nature of their calling.

The following of Christ is not a lifestyle option to be juggled with the many other interests that touch our lives. It is an invitation not simply to acknowledge Christ, but to allow his ways, his grace and teaching, to become the guiding inspiration of our lives. Such a commitment cannot be made without the detachment that is willing to subordinate everything to the service of Christ. In the concluding words of today’s Gospel: “None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.”

Detachment, the ground of discipleship, is illustrated throughout the gospels. Fishermen left their nets, a whole way of life, in order to follow Jesus. The rich young man, anxious to become a disciple, went away saddened because he could not relinquish his riches. Jesus himself, the servant of the Father, refused to put self-interest above his Father’s will.

It is within this context that we should understand the words of Jesus concerning father, mother, wife and children. These are indeed the fundamental preoccupation in our lives. They legitimately command our love and loyalty. They cannot, however, displace Jesus as the Lord of our lives. Discipleship inevitably involves the cross. It was within the context of the choices before us that Jesus commented that anyone who does not carry his cross cannot be his disciple. If we take our discipleship seriously we shall face difficult choices, sometimes painful choices.

Through the images of the man building a tower and the king marching to war, Jesus counselled his followers to consider the radical cost of discipleship. A building, if it is to reach completion, demands a careful assessment of materials. A military campaign, if it is to be successful, relies

on the careful assessment of necessary force. The Christian life, if it is to be sustained, cannot rely on the confused choices of our sinful humanity.

Only when we commit ourselves to the Lord, only when we face the painful choices to abandon everything that is contrary to the Gospel, are we truly disciples.

The psalm, with its prayer “that we might know the shortness of our life, that we might gain wisdom of heart”, sets our choices within the context of prayer. Without prayer our choices are, in the words of wisdom, unsure, our intentions unstable. Without prayer our decisions are frequently driven by a confusion of fear, self-interest and inadequacy.

Only in prayer can we prepare for the discipleship that will inevitably bring us into conflict with a selfish world. The cost of this discipleship goes to the heart of our dependency.

Do we depend on the many possessions that fill our lives, material and emotional, or do we depend upon the Lord who call and enables us? The words of Jesus, while they appear harsh, free us to become his true disciples.

“So, in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he give up all his possessions.”