

*In the name of the Divine Trinity: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I have to say, this week,  
I feel very sorry for anyone who is **going to church for the first time**.  
Its not always easy stepping in to a new church,  
And it certainly is made much worse,  
When you hear some of the more difficult passages of scripture.

This morning's **G contains such a passage**,  
And even for people who have held a faith for many years,  
It is still one they struggle with.

We know that discipleship is costly  
We know that it is not always easy to follow,  
But to hear a text like this, **where Jesus says**;  
*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers  
and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple*

These are **difficult words** to hear.  
But just because they make us uncomfortable  
We can't simply ignore them or skip over that bit.

So then, **how do we face this?**  
How can we understand and take seriously this command to hate,  
When we believe so strongly in a God of love?

We know that through the gospel,  
Jesus will often use **dramatic language** to make a point.  
He uses parables and everyday settings to help the disciples understand.  
We saw it just last week as he used the setting of a meal  
to talk about divine hospitality.  
Time and time again, we see Jesus using strong and descriptive language,  
with those he addresses,  
but especially with his disciples.  
Remember all the time He is with them,  
Jesus is trying to help them **understand what it means to be his follower**.

To prepare them for the difficulties that lie ahead,  
Difficulties that they cannot even begin to imagine.

This starkness of this language would help ensure that the disciples  
**understood their vocation**.  
That in this instance there could be no half measures,  
Tough decisions would lie ahead.

We must remember that for the disciples,  
They did not have the **benefit of hindsight**.  
Everything was new, everything was risky.  
We in contrast are in a privileged position,  
But the point remains the same for the disciples and for us.

As I have said before, we are all disciples  
And as such we all have vocations.  
Sometimes those **vocations will involve sacrifices**.  
It may be that you have to give up something you love,  
In order to look after someone you love.  
It may be that you have to move away,  
To follow a call to a particular job or profession.  
It may even be that you put your own needs or desires on hold,  
For the sake of someone who needs you.  
Our lives all involve sacrifice at some time or another,  
And our life in faith is no different.

It may be that actually, the ultimate sacrifices  
(whatever that looks like for each of us) will never have to be made.  
That we won't be forced to forsake all that we know and love,  
But we do **need to be prepared for sacrifices**, if they arise.  
In the end, nothing should come in the way of our relationship with God,  
In the way of our vocation.  
It is from our relationship with God that all else stems.

When God calls us to himself, **he calls us exactly as we are**.  
Whether we have our life set out nicely,  
Whether we are alone, or whether we have a family,  
Whether we are rich or whether we are poor.  
He loves and calls us as we are.

Jesus is not literally telling us to hate our mothers and our fathers,  
In fact I would say that he never incites us to hate anyone,  
But he is, through dramatic emphasis, trying to make us understand,  
That our **relationship with him must come first.**

He will never ask of us more than we are capable of giving,  
And will always give us the strength to do what he asks.  
But, it is **our responsibility to be ready**, to be prepared,  
For a time when that happens.

Jesus wants us to be **without doubt**  
when it comes to the commitment that we give him.  
Following him in our lives,  
does not simply mean following him from a distance.  
It means actively following him,  
Listening for him, discerning his will  
And living as his disciple.

In the G reading we hear of **great crowds accompanying Jesus.**  
Here he is on the way to Jerusalem,  
The place where he will face trial.  
Where he will suffer. Where he will die.  
But the people who are with him are there because  
they have seen his miracles,  
witnessed his healing,  
And heard of the promise of joy and glory  
for the downtrodden and the oppressed.  
They wanted to carry on, along this journey with him,  
become part of the next miracle,  
share the immediacy of the events,  
touch his glory.

And so **Jesus lays down the truth for them.**  
The truth that to follow Him isn't always easy,  
It isn't always plain sailing.  
Jesus wants followers, not hangers on.  
He wants sincere disciples, not opportunists.

**Are they willing to take a risk** for the sake of the Gospel?

**Are they prepared and ready** to pick up and carry their own cross?

These are questions that were asked of the disciples,  
But that **equally apply to us as well**,  
even though we are long way from the circumstances of his earthly ministry.  
Today following Christ can demand a kind of heroism.  
It may mean that we have to endure pain, rejection, misunderstanding,  
Or even hostility.  
Sometimes following Christ means that we may have to make difficult choices  
choices about our lifestyles, our attitudes, our friendships or our jobs.

You will all have been in those situations already, I'm sure,  
And many of us will continue to face those questions for the rest of our lives.  
But it is **right that these questions exist.**  
It is right because it means we are not just hangers on,  
following Christ for the rewards,  
the security, the community, or the consolation.  
That may well be a part of it, but that can't be all of it.  
We need to be fully committed to him and his values,  
Prepared to take risks, willing to make tough decisions.

In the end, this is what will bring us **greater joy** than we can ever imagine.  
It isn't about looking for hate, for pain, for suffering,  
Jesus has done the suffering for us.  
But we will be called upon to face parts of our lives with courage.

**Life with Jesus is a life worth living**,  
But in order to make it so we must place God at the centre  
of all we are and be willing to take a risk.  
We all have a cross to bear in life,  
But that is not something to be feared.

Jesus has been there first.  
He has shown us the way,  
And He gives us the perfect example.  
All we need do is have the **courage to follow him**,  
Not as a hanger on,  
But as a true disciple.  
Amen.