

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

There was a rich young man, named Anthony, who lived with his sister after they were orphaned and who possessed money and land. One day he heard the Gospel, "If you wish to be my disciple, go and sell all you have and follow me." So Anthony did that. He went home and sold all he had and gave the money to the poor, except for a little piece of land to support his young sister. The next day he heard the Gospel, "Do not be concerned about tomorrow," so he sold that as well and entrusted his sister to some holy widows and went out to live in the desert to know and love God alone. St Anthony of the Desert was the first of the Desert Fathers and he influenced so many men to live that way that the desert became a town.

I was thinking as I read this Gospel that it is a good thing that we started this Gospel with, "The Lord be with you," and it is as important that you said, "and with your spirit," because without grace we could not see this Gospel as good news but rather as an impediment to being a disciple. *Whoever does not give up all of his possessions cannot be my disciple.* I admit that when I first read this I thought, "Lord, is there a lighter version of this Gospel? I mean I understand that this is the five-star executive package of the Gospel but is there an economy package where I could be a disciple by being a little more mediocre? I mean really, give up all your possessions, carry a cross, hate others (which means in Gospel radical terms to love God more than anything on the earth)?" It is not surprising that when we hear this we think that is not possible or fair. The cost is too high. I can't even give up my morning coffee or slight comforts let alone all my possessions. I once had this lady tell me that she used to give up stuff during Lent then she just gave up being Catholic.

I have always loved marriages. I feel like I am participating in an epic ceremony with great individuals who are so bold and so heroic. Why? Because they are risking it all - their mental well-being, their financial well-being, their emotional well-being – in order to get married. Most people do not consider the cost of it, of what will happen if they don't make it. They don't look at all the fallen towers of other marriages. They just figure *We will be different.* Some know what often is a cause of failure, others do not, they are just excited to give it their all. Most of us join in the excitement of two people willing to risk it all on a fifty percent chance endeavour. We don't have the same feelings as we do when we encounter the call to discipleship as we do when people get married though. Why are we so scared to think that God is not good enough to reward us or that giving our lives to Him will be so bad? Many people who have given their lives and everything to God are quite content and happy. Actually, the more they gave themselves freely and totally they happier they are. I remember visiting a poor Clare who was describing a meal that the community would share and the joy of her heart was so surprising. I remember Sister Marisha who was a doctor and not even Catholic and yet when she met the nuns she became Catholic and even a sister herself. Boy did that nun radiate. It was a beautiful sight each time you saw her so beautiful was her joy. But, like marriage, joy takes a risk and following God has a risk. However, you never meet such a sad person as a priest or religious who is always concerned about money.

You must risk it all to give yourself for love. If you don't love Jesus, this command seems crazy to be ready to shed all for the Gospel. But this happens to this very day. Where I studied in Mission, two of the monks had to shed huge riches to enter. Fr Bede Reynolds and Fr Basil Foote left large fortunes to follow Jesus. Love for something greater than what this earth could offer. Love of God must be the prime thing on our soul. How does this love come to us? This isn't a government tax where God is here

to pry our wealth from us. Rather, God is here to give us a love that is more precious than all we own. So that what we own will seem very small and we will not fear losing it for the sake of a greater good.

We should not be surprised at people who are entering the most austere orders, because they want to totally give themselves to something versus give only half of themselves. Just as a man who is flirting with two women would make it hard to fully love and profit from the one relationship. I always find love inspiring and I think we all do. Self-sacrificing love is the desire of our souls. The saint for today, St Adrian of Nicomedia, was a soldier in charge of the Pretorian Guard and he witnessed the Christians being imprisoned and tortured and yet still holding on to their faith. In fact, they were actually more determined to hold on. Witnessing such love and courage, he stepped forward and professed the Christian faith, to be seized himself and go through the same torment. I know that we cannot be disciples if the Lord is not with us. And we cannot find real happiness and real love here on earth. We cannot do these great things without praying for the grace to love Heaven more than earth. When you first step out the devil will call you a loser and tell you that you are foolish because he wants us to be so attached to things that will not last so that he can have our soul. Our things will hold us back and we are called to be detached from them, just as a married couple must put their marriage and love ahead of all their earthly goods. We must pray for the grace to be free and you will be surprised that when you have the grace to love God as He loves you you will be free. If we knew how much we are loved, the Gospel of the day will seem like a good deal. I know the devil will try to scare each and everyone one of us that God is going to rob you of your joy and steal your possessions, like a tax crazy government. Fear is the devil's tool so if you experience fear you know who is talking. But it is a lie. God waits until you give it up through grace. He will not lead you faster than you can go. We must pray to accept this love. If we do not, we will not know freedom and be able to experience the joy and freedom God has to offer. I know because when I read this Gospel the first thing as I experienced was fear, then I talked to God and by the end I experienced elation and joy. Knowing God is not a robber but a Father who blesses and can give more than this world has to offer. Be not afraid. The Lord be with you.