

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year C
“The Cost of Discipleship”

Through the Words of the Gospel, May Our Sins be Wiped Away

Holy Spirit, Help Me to Preach with Great Clarity and Great Charity

In March of the year 1534, the Catholic bishops in England were presented with the Act of Succession, King Henry VIII's declaration that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was invalid and that papal authority would no longer be recognized in the Church within Henry's domain. Henry demanded that the bishops deny the truth of the validity of his marriage and the truth that Pope Clement VII was the head of the Church in England. Demonstrating a true absence of courage and faith in our Lord, every single bishop, apart from one, accepted Henry's lies. Only John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, a man known for his fervent prayer and voluntary suffering through fasting, stood firm in the truth, and for this he was imprisoned and executed—dying a martyr—a short time later.

At the beginning of today's Gospel reading, we are told that "*...the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled....*". Our Lord is beginning His final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, where He knows He will be tortured and crucified for each one of us. The Holy Spirit, speaking through St. Luke, wants us to understand that Jesus is about to give His last teachings, the things He truly wants us to know and understand. And the very first lesson that Jesus teaches, one that John Fisher knew well, is that Christian discipleship has a cost.

Whatever our state in life, we can put nothing ahead of Christ. Throughout Sacred Scripture, God Himself identifies those things that He considers horrible. Being spiritually lukewarm, as the English bishops most certainly were, is at the top of that list, and Jesus proclaims that those who are lukewarm He will vomit out of His mouth. Jesus Christ does not allow mediocrity when it comes to living lives as His disciples.

Today, there are many baptized Christians who shrug off the injustices we see all around us and make the claim that, “Oh well, we win in the end.” This is a presumptuous thing to say. Christ wins in the end. The Church wins in the end. But we should never presume individually that any single one of us is on that winning side. How we live in this life determines whether or not we are a member of that victorious team. Our decisions in life matter—in all things, every day, every moment. To claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and yet adopt an attitude of complacency and presume you are going to heaven is spiritual laziness, it is to be lukewarm, and it is a deceit of the devil. That is why St. Paul, a man who truly knew the cost of discipleship and for Jesus was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and constantly in danger, declared that each of us must “...*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling....*” And that means that we must be disciples of action.

We are judged by our deeds. What we do in this life matters. But the good news is that at the moment we were each baptized we were infused with great

supernatural graces, and if we open our hearts to these graces, we will hear Our Lord as He invites us to take up our cross and follow Him. To be a follower of Christ is to suffer. We must suffer. We must accept suffering. This has been the teaching of our Church from the very beginning. One of our early Church Fathers, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, put it this way, "...we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating His Passion by our sufferings, and honoring His blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified." In a few minutes, when you approach Our Lord to receive Him body, blood, soul and divinity in Holy Eucharist, you must say to Him, "I am joining myself to your sacrifice." Jesus did not die to save us from suffering; He died to save us through suffering. And He doesn't need our efforts, but He desires that we participate in His great works for our own benefit. Jesus wants us involved in His work and offers us the privilege to participate in His sufferings. And as He tells us in today's Gospel, we can hold nothing back.

"Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." The life of Christian discipleship is NOT a life of comfort. It is a life of work, a life of action.

"Lord, let me go first and bury my father." To the Jewish people, it was a supreme duty to bury one's parents and as Catholics we recognize burying the dead as one of the seven corporal works of mercy. But Jesus tells this man, *"Let the dead*

bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Of course Jesus wants this father to be buried, but He recognizes in the son’s response a hesitancy to put Jesus first and spread His kingdom.

“I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.”

To which Jesus responds with some of the scariest words ever spoken to each one of us, *“No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”* Jesus demands that our love for him must be above even our love for our closest relations, and once we set out on the path of discipleship there’s no going back to our old way of life. Discipleship requires total adherence, total gift of self to Christ, in which everything is given up to follow Him. Everything—our time, our resources, our efforts, our reputations, our relationships—must all be laid at His feet.

We must follow the example of the farmer Elisha, who in our first reading was called to be a prophet, the successor to Elijah, by giving up his whole livelihood. And he did, he gave up everything—his oxen, his plowing equipment, his farm—he gave up everything to follow God when Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha. Jesus is throwing His cloak over each of us right now. He is calling for radical detachment from the good things of this life in order to follow Him more completely.

Like John Fisher, we too face many challenges to the truth, challenges that will be overcome only if we are willing to sacrifice. Since 1973, when seven members of the United States Supreme Court bowed to Satan and agreed that abortion was a so-called “woman’s choice,” tens and tens of millions of our nation’s most innocent—children in their mothers’ wombs—have unjustly lost their lives. Think of the victory Satan has achieved in the loss of the smiling faces of the tens of millions of little boys and girls whose lives are not here to grace us. Now I certainly recognize that some of us present may have been personally touched by abortion in the past, and my words are in no way meant to be a condemnation. Our God is merciful. If you have repented of your sin and confessed it sacramentally, be assured that God’s mercy has come to rest upon you. If you haven’t, be assured that God’s mercy awaits you. What I want us to recognize now is that the entire abortion industry is built on nothing but lies. And because the founder of this industry is the father of lies himself, then that means that when we step into this war against our innocent, as St. Paul tells us, we are fighting “...*against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” We cannot go into this battle unprepared with a lukewarm faith. We cannot fight demons as unprepared humans. This is total war, and if you are holding anything back, as Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel, you’re not fit for the kingdom of Heaven. Consider this deeply. If your reputation with your family or your friends, or your

neighbors or your coworkers, is more important to you than Jesus Christ, you are not fit for the kingdom of Heaven. We must let go of those things which the world would have us believe are more important—our reputations, our comfort, even life itself. *“I say, then: live by the Spirit, and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.”* This is what the Holy Spirit urges in today’s passage from the Letter to the Galatians. If we surrender to the Holy Spirit, the things of this world will be important only to the extent we use them to serve God and to serve one another.

Thanks be to God, this past Friday our current Supreme Court, ruling in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, struck down the evil 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. That being the case, the abortion debate will be returned to each state, and each state will determine how abortion is to be addressed.

And right here in Indiana we have the spiritual power to bring all this killing to an end. Twelve men set in motion the fall of the Roman Empire through the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Apostles were completely dedicated. They lived as saints and died as martyrs. Suffering is the key to holiness and the key to victory. We must bear in our bodies the marks and wounds of the Passion of Jesus Christ. It is our way to heaven. Jesus admonishes us in today’s Gospel to *“Follow me.”* Our eternal destiny depends on how we respond. We all have the call to stand up against those who promote the murder of children in the womb, those who have given themselves over to evil. We must engage in this battle. And we can’t worry about

what other people say or think about us. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* God is asking us to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the salvation and redemption of the world. Do we follow God, or do we follow man? It’s that simple.

Not enough of us have yet made the decision to sacrifice as Christ asks us to do. How do we know that? Because just two miles from St. Michael the Archangel, south down Tibbs and a few hundred yards west on 16th Street, is the Clinic for Women, a place where the lives of innocent children are terminated on a regular basis. In 2020, the last year for which numbers are available, 1,049 of our littlest and most defenseless brothers and sisters had their lives violently taken from them at that abortuary. Pope Leo XIII, who gave us our Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, declared that, “Christians are born for combat.” It is time for each and every one of us to engage in combat—to sacrifice, to act, to fight to put an end to the injustices committed against our littlest brothers and sisters in such close proximity to where we profess to commit our lives to Our Lord right now.

So, how do we suffer and engage in this fight?

First, PRAY. Pray intensely like you have never prayed before. Pray in particular for an end to abortion in our city, for the closure of the Clinic for Women abortuary and for the conversion of those who work there. And I challenge the men

in particular. How many of you have this in your pocket? If you aren't praying the Rosary every day, you aren't in the battle. Stand up and be a man by kneeling in front of your Queen. And again, don't worry about what anyone else says or thinks about you.

Second, FAST. Find something to deprive your body of that you truly desire. And give it up—for the rest of your life. Offer that up in conjunction with the sufferings and pains of Christ on the Cross. Jesus Himself tells us that some demons “...cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting.” Most certainly the abortion demon is one such demon.

Third, TAKE ACTION. Pope Pius V correctly proclaimed that, “All the evils of the world are due to lukewarm Catholics.” If you've never engaged in this battle, now is the time. If you have engaged, work like you've never worked before. Engage in social media from a pro-life perspective, contact your government representatives and encourage them to do all they can to advance the cause of life and protect the unborn, volunteer at our local crisis pregnancy centers, witness outside of this city's abortion clinics. We have an obligation to fulfill our sacred duty before God and man and not let this world plunge any further into darkness. To remain silent on the greatest injustice of our day and age is to align ourselves with the cowardly and unholy bishops who turned their backs on God and bowed to Henry VIII. Instead, with the Psalmist today let us proclaim, “*My heart is glad and*

my soul rejoices” because we recognize what an honor and a privilege it is to serve the Lord in this fight against the unholiness that is the abortion industry.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening; you have the words of everlasting life.”

John Fisher provides a shining example of what it means to listen to the message given us by the Lord today. Mediocrity, lukewarmness, in the spiritual life is not the Catholic way to live. In his final surviving sermon, which he preached on Good Friday, this Catholic hero called upon King Henry VIII and all men to embrace the cost of Christian discipleship. In language that has lost none of its relevance today, he preached, “But if thou dost refuse this remedy, and follow the desires of this world and of the flesh, be thou well assured that then thou shalt pay thine own debts amongst the devils in hell with everlasting woe.” When all the other prelates in England, none of whose names are remembered, turned away from the truth, John Fisher proved himself to be a man of the Gospel truth and a man, because of his life of prayer and fasting, who had the courage to proclaim that truth unabashedly. That’s why today we know and celebrate him every June 22nd as Saint John Fisher.

Through his intercession, may our Lord fill each of us with the grace to embrace the cost of discipleship, to place Christ first, to hold nothing back, to refuse to compromise with injustice, and to a total commitment of prayer, of fasting, and of action.