

There is no denying that we are in an economic crisis here in America. Our country is feeling the effects and so are we. Foreclosure rates on sub-prime and balloon mortgages has reached 40% in some parts of the country. Gas is down now, but remember when it was \$4.00 a gallon? The ripple effects of just these two factors have had a ripple effect on the cost of everything that we genuinely need, food, clothing and shelter.

And we have all been effected. Whether it is the high price of hamburger helper, or the loss of a home, no one is untouched.

There is a cost to living here in America. It is real, it is tangible and it is personal.

And I can't afford to live in Europe, but then neither can most Europeans!

And if the truth be known, I cannot imagine living anywhere except here in the US. Even with all that is currently happening, it is still the greatest country in the world in which to live.

This sentiment will be echoed by anyone who lives here who has had to live in a country with fewer freedoms and opportunities.

Yet this came at a cost as well. In order to reach this country, many risk all they have. Some in our community know this well.

And the freedoms and opportunities themselves came at a price. We do not often think of what these gains cost the country in terms of money, resources and human life.

And any of us who have lost a loved one to war can tell us too well of how personal the cost of freedom is.

Just this last week, we inaugurated America's first African-American President. And what did that cost us? I'm not talking about the millions spent in campaigning, or even the millions spent on the inauguration! I'm talking about the incalculable cost of human effort and the cost of dignity and pride just to get the right for women and African-Americans to even vote!

We will never know the real cost of Equal Rights for all, guaranteed by a Bill of Rights but only recently applied to a large sector of our population. And by the way, we aren't done yet.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans can attest that the cost was great and very personal. What we do know is that while the cost was high, it cost our country, our states and our local communities far less than we have gained for the effort.

Everything costs something, doesn't it? Some things cost more than others. There is no free lunch as they say. And everyone has a cost that is corporate, in that the society pays a price and one that is very personal and sometimes known only to themselves.

And the more we have, the more precious our rights and freedoms, the more we are responsible for them. The cost is always going up!

Here in America we enjoy the freedom of Religion. That is we are free to believe and worship according to the edicts of our conscience. That right was and is fundamental to the founding of our country and it is fundamental to who we are as human beings.

The practice of any Religion, is dependent upon faith. As Christians we know that faith is a free gift from God. Free here means that it is the action of God independent of anything we can do to possibly earn it. It cannot be earned, it is not possible to buy it. It is a gift from God.

That being said it is not free.

Let's look at today's Gospel: Four of Jesus' first disciples had to pay a price, not for the gift of faith, but in living out that very same faith. They left their jobs, their security, even their family in order to follow Jesus. They would all sacrifice greatly in order to live that faith in the power of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' death and resurrection. Three of these men would be martyred and one exiled, and so the free gift of Christianity cost them something none-the-less.

Remember, everything has a cost, and while faith is freely given, discipleship can be very expensive.

I have been around enough converts to the faith that have had to endure much loss. Parents, siblings, friends and even children have turned against a man or woman who has embraced the very Catholic faith that we confess.

Ministers from various denominations have had to give up their livelihood once they came into full communion with the Catholic Church.

But, admittedly, although it happens, it doesn't happen to most of us. The majority of us were baptized as infants and inherited this great gift.

What about us? What about you.....and me? What is our cost of discipleship? For some of us it is substantial, isn't it? Some of us can identify the costs, but they are manageable enough.

I'm worried about those who cannot identify the costs.

Elsewhere in scripture, Jesus tells us that we need to consider the costs of being His disciples.

In our second reading, St. Paul tells us that there is a cost that many of us have never really thought about. He tells disciples from the early church that they need to behave differently. Granted the message is somewhat difficult to discern without some help and context. Paul was speaking directly to people who believed the return of the Christ was imminent! They needed to act and be different than they were before they had the gift of faith.

St. Paul speaks to us in the very same context. We believe that the Christ will come again!

What is it we proclaim? Christ has died, Christ is Risen and Christ will come again!

What is it we pray "Thy Kingdom Come!"?

If we proclaim this and we pray this we hope we believe this! And if we believe it, then we must live like we believe it. The faith to believe it is free, the responsibility of faith is that it costs us something.

St. Paul is telling us that we need to live differently now that we are in Christ.

That means that we need to change some of the things we do.

Now, in light of all that I have said so far, our costly response to faith is most often not as much as leaving our homes, families and giving up everything that is good.

It does cost us our lives. And most often we spend one small piece at a time.

For all of us who proclaim Jesus it means that we can't be gossiping in the break room anymore. But for some that is a greater cost than for others.

We men, we can't do what is is we like so much to do by ourselves anymore. For some that will be a piece of cake, for others it will be lifelong struggle.

Loving our spouses, our children, our parents, even when they seem unlovable.

Treating people with respect that we find difficult to respect.

Doing the dishes when you hate to do dishes, and doing them because you love the ones who dirtied them, yes, but doing them as well for your alcoholic spouse or for your rebellious child.

Doing all those things we find distasteful, even though they are good and beneficial.

Small little deaths to ourselves, one a day, ten a day. Whatever it takes.

There is not a single Patriot, not a single Freedom Marcher, not a single Suffragette that didn't live like this. Every day, another sacrifice for the cause of the greater good.

There is not a single Saint that didn't live this way as well. And although not everyone of us are called to be Patriots, we who are baptized are all of us called to be Saints.

We live free in America because of the sacrifices of others. We live free in Christ, by His Sacrifice on the Cross. We live abundantly in Christ because of His Humility to come to us in the appearance of simple bread and wine. We live for others in Christ in thanksgiving and in preparedness for heaven, the ultimate greater good.