

We live in a country that is star-struck. When a story shows up on television or the newspaper about Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift or George Clooney more people than I can imagine will direct their attention toward them. I understand that. The lives of the rich or famous or the powerful are, in some ways, more interesting than our own.

Even when they mess up and fall off their pedestal, we shower them with our attention. Lindsay Lohan was only slightly interesting as an actress, but she is far more interesting as a boozing, drug-taking former-actress.

Celebrity is not confined to our immediate times. The first line of the Gospel today tells us that “**Great crowds were traveling with Jesus**”. In His day, Jesus was a celebrity. We don’t think about that very much but it is true. Palm Sunday comes to mind right away. Scripture does not explain to us what is meant by “**great crowds**”, but we are told elsewhere that He fed 5,000 men and untold numbers of women and children with two fish and five loaves of bread. I’m thinking that “great crowds” might mean ‘too many to count’.

I’m sure many of these followers believed He was the Messiah. He was most certainly seen as a great prophet and a great rabbi or teacher. They knew He was a miracle worker who had fed so... many... people. And so they traveled with Him. When He stopped they stopped. When He ate they ate. In this way, traveling with Jesus, following Him was pretty easy going.

But Jesus was and is more. He was and is the Son of the Living God, and indeed, God. And so His words, His actions, His teachings are greater than those of any prophet.

Today He tells the crowds and us that travelling with Him and being His disciple are two different things.

Travelers enjoy the trip and the company. They like the adventure. But to be a disciple is to do more than follow a leader. It is the active pursuit to be like the leader in all things. Travelling is free, or at least cheap, but

discipleship has a cost -

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”.

There is certainly shock value to His words. He appears to be in direct conflict with the 4th commandment, to honor your father and mother and the commandments of love. Jesus Himself said that not one tiny dot of the Law will be changed.

No, He is using hate as a very sharp contrast to love. What He is saying is that to be His disciple, one must love Him first and foremost and above all things. And then we are free to love others for and in and through the love we have for Him. To love others for the sake of God. I think the crowds would have seen this more clearly than we do, for over- exaggeration was common language in rabbinical teaching. They were a people and culture that revered the family so the words caught their attention.

They were also a people and culture that understood the cross in more immediate ways than we do today. We understand that to take up our cross is to, with the help of Jesus, accept the physical, emotional and spiritual burdens of life and to carry them, in faith and love.

These crowds had seen the crucified writhing in pain, dying in shame.

We can only imagine the cross. We see it as a sign of victory, they saw it as death and to willingly pick it up was to pick up the instrument on which they would give up their lives.

My friends, there is a lot of easy believism in the world today. Accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and you are done - you are locked in to heaven. There are many today who believe He is the Messiah, that He is a miracle-worker. Even today Jesus has many followers and travelers. I don't want you to misunderstand me. I am not questioning others sincerity, or piety or faith. As a sinner, I don't get to do that.

And it certainly is true that we each must come to a point when we choose to accept or to reject Jesus as saviour, to accept or reject that His death and resurrection is victory over sin and death.

Here is where we separate the travelers from the disciples. Faith in Jesus is not a one-time choice. We choose it daily, sometimes even minute by minute. Discipleship is hard. And so Our Lord gave us the Sacraments and the Mass and the Church gave us Scripture to help us. We have wisdom from on high in the form of the Holy Spirit as our first reading tells us. We have the examples of the lives of the Saints and we have their intercessions on our behalf. And we need all the help we can get, because being a Christian is more than being just a follower of Christ.

Let me ask you, how many of those thousands of people who travelled with Christ in today's Gospel became disciples? I'm sure that after counting the cost, many accepted and followed. . . and some turned away. But how many stood at the foot of the cross?

The Apostles? Not Peter, not James, not Thomas, only John . . . and our Lady, who suffered her greatest sorrow there. We are told of a few other women being present as well. No crowd, no multitude shouting Hosanna and waving palm branches.

To love the Lord is to stand at the foot of the Cross as a disciple. To accept our own death to ourselves, as grace in the moment of the crucifixion. But if we are not standing at the foot of the cross right now, as I know most of us poor sinners are not, let us hope in God, trust in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, avail ourselves to the Sacraments of healing and restoration and pray that our faith becomes stronger and our love for Jesus becomes greater, surpassing our love for all things .

The Good News of the Gospel is that God never desires to lose anyone. Every person is precious to Him for we are made in His likeness. Count the costs of discipleship. Expect to pay them, but do not fear them for our God is mighty and His love is sure and we are never asked, not even expected,

to do it on our own.