

## **The Love of the Crowd**

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Lk 14:25-33  
Ave Maria Catholic Church, September 4, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

In today's gospel, we hear how "great crowds were traveling with Jesus," (Lk 14:25). Great crowds! Huge crowds! That would be enough to excite many people! Many people do things just for that very reason: to gain big crowds! For some people, having control of the crowd is what matters. When that happens, they feel important; they feel powerful.

That is the goal of the prince, according to Machiavelli. For him, the prince's ultimate goal is "success." To be successful, the prince must dominate the crowd. Now, to manipulate the crowd, the prince must be malleable or flexible. He must be ready to say one thing one day, and the opposite the following day. He must be prepared to change with the winds of fortune and the demands of the mass. Machiavelli suggests that the ruler should 'color' his nature for public consumption. Then, the prince must try to please people for personal gain. That is truly Machiavellian.

The gospel today tells us that "*great crowds were traveling with Jesus.*" What a success! Now, let us imagine the surprise of the disciples and apostles when Jesus turned toward the crowd and said: "*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.*"

That is not what the crowd wanted to hear. Perhaps, the disciples and apostles were ready to do some damage control by restructuring Jesus' words. But they did not even have time to attempt that because Jesus immediately said: "*Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*" That was another blow!

Jesus is not a worldly prince who looks for the applause of people. Jesus is the eternal king who comes to say not what people want to hear but what people need to hear. Jesus is not a worldly prince who searches for numbers and the biggest crowd. Jesus is the eternal king who looks at the heart of people and wants to instill in them personal goodness, truth, and purity.

### **What is Jesus saying to the crowd?**

In a sense, Jesus asks them: are you ready to follow me? If you are, let us talk about love. Our spiritual life can be summarized in the twofold law of "*loving God, with the whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and everyone else for God's sake.*"

Sometimes, we forget that fundamental distinction and build a world where God is not known and loved. In his work *The City of God* (bk. 14, c. 28), Saint Augustine describes this situation: "*Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self,*

*even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self . . . For the one seeks glory from men, but the greatest glory of the other is God.”*

Jesus is telling us that if we are going to be his disciples, we can love no one more than we love him. This extends to all human relationships, even to our family relationships.

The decision to love Jesus more than everyone else has consequences. Let me quote here some comments from Msgr. Pope. He came last year to preach our Lenten Mission in our parish. He says: *“If your boss instructs you to do something immoral, just say, ‘Sorry, Boss.’ If your accountant advises you to save money by paying unjust wages or cutting necessary benefits, say ‘Sorry, no.’ If your boyfriend or girlfriend pressures you to have sex, say, ‘Sorry, Dear. If your ‘friend’ pressures you to use drugs, abuse alcohol, skip school, or steal, say, ‘Sorry, Buddy.’ If your spouse calls you away from teaching your children the ways of faith, tell him/her ‘Sorry, Honey.’ If your child pressures you to give him something unwise or sinful, say, ‘Sorry, child of mine.’”* Strong words, but true.

Then, when we say no, someone may react by saying: *“You hate me!”* But the opposite is true. Love without order is not love. Jesus is telling us that love has priorities, and Jesus, our Lord and God, says that He must have absolute priority over even the closest human relationships in our life.

If your spouse, your son or daughter, or your best friend comes and says: *“You must love me above all,”* the answer is clear: *“I love you in God, and by loving you in this way, I do not love you less, but I love you more, even more than you can image!”*

**Perhaps, we are content with this idea. However, Jesus does not stop there.**

Jesus teaches a second point regarding discipleship: *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple,”* (Lk 14: 27).

The cross is the way of love. Yes, the cross speaks about death, but with Jesus, the message of the cross becomes a message of love. On the cross, love, mercy, and faithfulness overcome evil, sin, and death.

Following Jesus in this way implies the embrace of the cross — by living a life of love, mercy, and faithfulness. When we love as Jesus calls us to love, we understand the things for which we live and the things for which we are ready to die.

When we follow Jesus in this way, we also understand that “sacrifice” and “renunciations” are not “bad words”, but they are the natural and most glorious consequences of a love that is true, pure, good, and beautiful!

**Finally, let us look again at that crowd.**

How many of those gathered in that mass were followers of Jesus? How many of them stayed with Jesus up to the very end? Perhaps, they were all excited when they saw the great worker of miracles. Perhaps, they enjoyed the sound of Jesus's voice and found Jesus' stories and parables captivating. Perhaps, they were just excited by being part of the crowd! But how many really were with Christ?

Jesus does not look at the numbers. Jesus looks at the heart of every individual man and woman and tells us personally not what we want to hear, but what we need to hear.

We claim to be Jesus's followers. We do not just follow the worker of miracles and the preacher of good news. By being followers of Christ, we believe that we are called to love as Jesus loves us. That love has a sign, and that is the sign of the cross.

Let us set our hearts in order. Let us love what is good, let us hate what is evil, and let us embrace sacrifices and renunciations for the sake of Christ. Those are the signs of true discipleship and the pledge of eternal happiness. Amen