

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
September 8, 2019  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Homily

This week a Canadian Jesuit was named as a cardinal. Fr. Michael Czerny, SJ will be installed on October 5. He works on behalf of migrants and refugees, and helped write "Laudato Si," a papal encyclical concerning the environment. The announcement followed the anniversary of the canonization of St. Teresa of Calcutta. Today's readings can be better understood with the life of Mother Teresa. Together they help us understand how religious journey with us as disciples: with difficulty, suffering and joy.

The Gospel tells us that "large crowds were travelling with Jesus," but he pointed out the special requirements of discipleship. "Whoever comes to me and does not hate their father and mother; spouse and children; brothers and sisters, yes and even their life itself, cannot be my disciple." These are shocking words. We have to understand them within the broader context of his teaching. The catechism tells us that we have to prefer Jesus to the things of this world, and renounce everything else for the sake of his Gospel (2544). Mother Teresa left her widowed mother and sister at the age of 18. She travelled from Albania to Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto, and never saw her family again. She took vows of chastity to follow Christ more closely and to give herself to God more fully.

Wis 9:13-18  
Ps 90  
Phil 9b-10, 12-17  
Lk 14:25-33

She joined with the religious of the ages, to signify the glory of the resurrection, where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven (Mt 22:30)."

The vows of chastity, obedience and poverty are freely accepted. Paul tells us that, "I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced." These vows do not limit freedom, but allow it to flourish in the service of God and his Church. They manifest the freedom of the Spirit who enlivens the Church with gifts and graces according to the will of God. Vows are an imitation of Christ who emptied himself for our salvation. Through them Mother Teresa became fully present to those around her, and open to revelation from God. He called her to love the unloved, to start the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta; and to accept a fourth vow: "to give wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor."

This call within a call required discernment but could not be denied. Mother Teresa later said that, "To fail would have been to break the faith." Jesus talks about discernment within the Gospel. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" Do I have enough to persevere? to succeed? to finish? The answer is always the same. We never have enough.

However, with trust and reliance on God, we always have enough.

Poverty, obedience and chastity are demanding and not all the costs can be projected. Jesus says, "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." She carried the crosses of want, witnessed suffering, and countered opposition. Pope St. John Paul II posed the question: "Where did Mother Teresa find the strength and perseverance to place herself completely at the service of others?" In the same breath he gives the answer: "She found it in prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart."

However, Mother Teresa carried another cross in private: difficulty and doubt. She said, "Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ... If there be God—please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul." After the bright flash of her call came years of spiritual separation, broken only for a month when Pope Pius XII died. In the first reading, we hear that "Our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind."

Original sin mars our reason. It can begin to know God through his works, but is unfocused (if not blinded) with ignorance swayed by passion. His truths might not be beyond us...but they do elude us. Our image of God is a poor translation. Because of our limits, our words fall short and cannot express him.

In her weakness, Mother Teresa followed Jesus onto his cross where he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But Paul gives us a reason for this desolation. "Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother." And in ways she couldn't perceive, "the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom." God allowed her desolation for a purpose, and it was followed by consolation: union with the spouse of the Church in the glory of heaven.

Our life is a discernment on how to follow Christ and serve his Church. For this Eucharist, let us invoke the prayers of St. Teresa of Calcutta for Cardinal-elect Czerny. Through her intercession, "Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper the work of our hands."