

Dear Parishioners,

Noah was enjoying his fourth birthday. It was a great party and time to open gifts and cards. One card had four one-dollar bills in it, and he was delighted. Four was a big number. He was rich! He could buy a new computer game he wanted. The adults were smiling – they knew that he was not old enough yet to calculate the cost of real things. They knew he would have to open lots of cards with dollar bills and probably sacrifice some other thing he would like to have before he would have enough money to buy the new game. As is typical with a child, however, Noah soon became lost in opening his other gifts and forgot the four dollars and what he wanted to buy with them. In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus challenges those following Him to "calculate the cost" of discipleship. This cost is steep.

Discipleship requires both renunciation and calculation. Those who wish to follow Jesus must renounce everyone and everything that gets in the way of a single-minded response to Jesus' invitation to be His disciple. At the same time, disciples are not naively to follow Jesus. They must calculate and consent to the cost – the price of giving their all ... even perhaps their own life. What the One who calls gives disciples in return, however, is beyond calculation – the fullness of new and eternal Life.

Jesus is using pretty radical language about renunciation and calculation in order to give us a chance to consider carefully what we do when we say "yes" to discipleship. Like so many things about life, we might enter into following Jesus with great enthusiasm and energy. But the cost of discipleship might soon dampen our spirits and lead us to lose sight of the gift of new Life Jesus offers us.

Being a disciple is not something we can undertake half-heartedly or frivolously. It is a decision to be pondered and weighed. The cost is steep. Like Jesus, we give our lives over for the good of others. *Are we willing to pay the price? **Every day?** Do we calculate carefully?*

The radical cost of discipleship suggests that our "yes" is one that must be learned. We grow into it. As we make choices to live out discipleship, we enter more deeply into its meaning and demands. At the same time as we are faithful disciples, we also continually receive from God the strength to follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

Our "yes" to being followers of Jesus and taking up His mission is first ritualized at Baptism. Whether babies or adults makes no difference ... that "yes" is always less than perfect. There is always room in our lives to grow deeper into Christ. Our ongoing baptismal "yes" is our ongoing assessment of the self-emptying stance of discipleship. Jesus is constantly inviting us to listen to Him. We spend our whole lives bringing our fullest attention to what He is saying. This Gospel passage gives us no hint about what happens if we cannot follow through on these radical demands of discipleship. From the history of God's dealing with the Chosen People, we know God is a God of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. Jesus lays out the radical demands of discipleship. Our human weakness begs us to call on God's mercy and forgiveness when we cannot quite measure up. In all things, God will sustain us. God never goes back on the divine promise to give new Life to those who are faithful.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always!

Fr. Larry