

In our Gospel today Jesus tells us what Discipleship requires of us. I want to speak briefly about three of these conditions of discipleship. The first is putting God before anything or anyone else. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." This doesn't mean we should love our parents or family any less. It means when we prioritize our life and its time. If we don't do this, then we really don't know God yet, that God is our ultimate concern. He is first, the source from which our lives flow and return.

Here is one little way to help with this. What's the very first thing you do when you wake up? What about beginning the day first thing with the first thing? I mean a short prayer, before anything else, dedicating the day and its events and actions to God. Right from the start, then, we will recognize the right priorities for the next 24 hours. We will not always live out those priorities fully, but if we daily make that prayer, then putting God first becomes our explicit goal in the day and in our life. Form this small habit. We can all do it.

Jesus' second condition for Discipleship is carrying our cross.

"Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." This sounds really hard – and perhaps unrealistic. We can think, "I don't have any crosses," supposing our crosses must be as heavy as Jesus' was. So, we may not even be able to recognize our true crosses. The idea can seem abstract, just the kind of talk religious people use. So, to help us name our crosses, here's a definition of the crosses Jesus wants us to carry. We can think of our crosses as those things Jesus wants us to pay special attention to; as those things we can not avoid, those things we do not like; and as those things we cannot change.

Think about how many times each day we are faced with those experiences: things we can't get out of (lots of those); things we dislike, even hate – we all have preferences and we all suffer; things in our lives we don't have control over – but so wish we did! Those are the crosses Jesus gives to us or allows. We all have them – most of them smallish, but irritating. And Jesus is asking us all to carry those crosses.

What does that look like? A while back I preached a homily about Fr. Willy Doyle, the British Army chaplain from World War I, who died in the odor of sanctity, as they say. Fr. Doyle once preached a retreat that touched upon this question. It was about complaining. He said, “I will never complain.’ You will get to heaven by keeping that one resolution, ‘Never to complain.’” I think he’s right. We will know we have accepted and lifted our daily crosses when we don’t complain about them. What a challenge! I include myself here certainly. I love to complain. (It’s sad). But what if we were to make that resolution: “I will never complain.”? When we’re tempted to complain about something, that’s a clear alarm, a ringing bell, that we are facing one of life’s crosses – and how will we respond? Will we lift it and offer it to Jesus – by consciously not complaining about it? Jesus says that’s what His Disciples do . . . and I think it will change our lives if we fulfil that one resolution.

A third condition of Discipleship Jesus mentions is laying down our life for Jesus. That sounds particularly hard – and unattainable.

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Here I think of a new saint, St. Giuseppe Moscati who died in 1927, and was canonized in 1987. Moscati was born in 1880 into an aristocratic Italian family. He was intellectually brilliant. He went to medical school and became a doctor in 1903. Afterwards he taught part time at a university and was a sometime administrator of a hospital. And he helped discover insulin as a treatment for diabetes. Moscati was an all-around successful professional. But that wasn’t all he was. He was a Disciple of Christ, He put God first – and that meant losing his life, although not in the ordinary way we think of.

He could have had a professorship and more time for research. He could have become very wealthy. But instead Dr. Moscati took a private vow of poverty, and never married, discerning that God wanted him more available for His work. He treated the poor of Naples for free, went into the poor quarters of Naples during the 1911 Cholera epidemic to treat the dying there. His entire life was a choice of service

over prestige. In the Italian-made movie about Moscati's life found on the Formed website, at the end of his life, Dr. Moscati tells another doctor, who had had that successful university career, and who questioned Moscati's choices, "In my poverty I have found everything."

"Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Many of us want to be successful. We properly want to use the gifts God gave us. That is all still possible – while losing our lives for Jesus in the way He calls us to do so.

We are all called to deep Discipleship with Jesus. And that looks like something concrete. Among other things it means putting God first, above all else – each day. It means carrying our crosses, those things in our lives we don't choose, don't like, and can't change, by accepting them without complaint. And it means refusing the life the World tempts us with us, so as to embrace the life Jesus calls us to. Let us live so, and we will have beautiful lives following Him.