

June 17, 2012
Second Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Jesus' simple invitation, "Come, follow me," provides the material for a life and the program for a lifetime. There are so many things to consider in this invitation, but let us limit ourselves to just three, which especially inform us about Christ himself.

First, "Come, follow me" means that Christ is our Leader, our *archegos*, as he is called in the Epistle to the Hebrews 12:1-2---"let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith." In his humanity God's Son has lived a perfect life of faith, and we keep Him constantly in our regard as our model of faith.

God's Son has passed through the full human experience, and He is the one person in history who has done it right. He alone has lived completely as God intended human beings to live. He has modeled human life and death in his own life and death.

The author of Hebrews uses the present participle to indicate what is meant by "looking unto Jesus." In Greek the present participle refers to sustained and continued action, not a single and isolated action. *Aphorontes*, says Hebrews, which means continually looking at Jesus, not glancing at him once in a while. It means fixing our eyes on him at all times, not for a moment losing sight of him.

In this respect Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. Just as the saints of the Old Testament were to have the Torah constantly in their minds, always before their eyes, we are to have constantly in our minds and always before our eyes the One who is the fulfillment of the Torah.

Christ is to become our fixation, not our "fix." We all know what is commonly meant by a "fix," a word that refers to a narcotic that is taken to "hold us over." Jesus is not a fix; he is *the* fixture. We are not to take Christ in small doses, as it were, a periodic vaccination of the Jesus germ, to guarantee that we never "catch" the real thing. Christ is not our "fix." He is to become the sustained and constant preoccupation of our minds and hearts.

If we are to run the race that he has run, then we must at all times know exactly where he is. This is why there must be something obsessive about the Christian life. If we are to be, as St. Paul says repeatedly, "in Christ," then Christ must be our very atmosphere. Christ must become our constant mode of thought, which St. Paul refers to as "the mind of Christ."

Second, Christ is our Teacher. In the Gospels, in fact, the disciples often address Him as "Rabbi," a Semitic word that means "teacher." He tells us to learn from him. To learn is to be set free from ignorance and deception.

And what is required of someone who wants to learn? Docility, which is to say

"teachable-ness." The surest guarantee against learning anything is the sense that one already knows it.

When Jesus invites us to learn from Him, he adds, "For I am meek and humble of heart." If meekness and humility are the qualities of Christ our Teacher, what level of meekness and humility are required of us as his students? The term disciple is simply the Latin word for student. As Christians we are life-long students of Christ, ever eager to learn more.

Third, Christ is our Helper. When we follow him, he does not run out so far ahead of us as to lose track of us. It is he that sustains us in the struggle.

How does Jesus treat those that endeavor to follow him? St. Paul learned the answer to this question while he was first at Corinth. St. Luke tells us, "Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.'"

Christ our Lord does no less for us than he did for Paul. When we stumble, he is always there to hold us up. When we slip and fall, it is he that restores us to the race. When we wander and become lost, he leaves the ninety-nine sheep on the mountain and goes out in search of us. When we can no longer walk, he carries us. When we are weary with toil and grow faint from the journey, he it is that upholds us.

In joy he strengthens us. In despondency he cheers us. In repentance he forgives us. In all things he teaches us. The Leader and Teacher Christ, whom we follow, is our ever-present help in time of need, the food for our journey, our living water in the desert, our fortress in affliction, the healing of our hearts, our solace in every sorrow.

The name of Jesus, therefore, is seldom absent from our lips and never absent from our hearts.

With blind Bartimaeus we cry out to him.

With Mary Magdalene we cling to him.

With the leper we plead with him.

With the widow of Nain we trust in him.

With Thomas we love and adore him.

With Martha of Bethany we strive in all things to serve him, and with her sister Mary we sit docile at his feet.

With Peter we walk on the very waters in response to him.

With the Apostles and holy women, we prostrate ourselves before him.

This is what it means to be a disciple, and to all this Jesus our Leader and Teacher invites us, when he says to us, as he said to the first four of his disciples, "Come, follow Me!"

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