

Today's readings tell us all about what we can't do, don't they?

- **We can't understand what God intends**
- **We can barely make plans for our day**
- **We can't understand God's timing, since for him 1000 years are like yesterday when it is gone**
- **Even St Paul knows he can't make people do the right thing**

And Jesus? Is he a beacon of hope for us today? No, not really. He tells us we can't be his disciples. These are some of Jesus's "hard sayings."

- **Jesus says we can't be his disciples unless we love him more than anyone else... our spouse, our family, even ourselves.**
- **Jesus says we can't be his disciples unless we carry our cross. And one does not simply walk about carrying a cross. One carries a cross to one's crucifixion.**
- **Jesus says we can't be his disciples unless we renounce all our possessions.**

These are very "hard sayings." And yet, it is what he says.

"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."

I have a long homily about hate, but I'll spare you that. Trust me on this... Jesus is exaggerating to make the point - our love for him needs to be so strong, that all other love looks like hate, by comparison.

How much do we love Jesus? Do we love him more than our families?

- **When we were kids, we did what we knew we were supposed to do when our parents were watching. Do we love Jesus enough to pray when nobody is watching to give their approval, or when everyone at school or work is watching us pray before we eat, and laughing?**
- **We visit our family on their special days. Do we love Jesus enough to visit him in the Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation, or even more often, if we can?**
- **Our mothers made us apologize to our siblings. Do we love Jesus enough to say we are sorry by going to confession?**
- **Would we die for our mothers, or for our spouse, for our children? What about for Jesus? Do we love him that much? That's how much he loves us.**

Did you notice Jesus didn't say "I won't let you be my disciple?" He said you "cannot be my disciple." He is not saying it isn't permitted, he is saying that it is impossible. He is not issuing a decree, he is just describing reality.

It is sometimes difficult to be a disciple. It is impossible without love. We might try to do the right thing for some other reason, but we'll just be like the man building a tower who couldn't finish, or the king that has to go surrender to his enemy. We might begin, and make a little progress, but we can't finish without love.

And what about the cross? The cross is a sign of death, and an instrument of torture. How do we carry it?

One way we carry our cross is to “memento mori,” to, “remember death.” Saint Basil tells us

“By bearing the cross [Saint Paul] also announced the death of his Lord, saying *the world is crucified to me, and I to the world*, which we also anticipate in our very baptism, in which our old man is crucified...”

In baptism, we die to death and sin, and rise to a new life. Carrying our cross means to remember that death to sin, and our new life, and, of course, our eventual physical death. Not morbidly, but thankfully for that life.

The cross was not only a sign of death, but also an instrument of torture and suffering. Some suffering comes into every life. We wrestle with illness and death, with financial difficulties, with social conflict, with family problems, with addictions, with misunderstanding, with hatred, with imprisonment.

Other sufferings, like fasting, we take on intentionally to cooperate with God’s work in our hearts. How do we bear these sufferings?

The abuelitas tell us to “offer up” our sufferings. St Gregory the Great, whose feast day we celebrated last week, has some wise words on this:

"In two ways we bear our Lord's cross, either when by abstinence we afflict our bodies, or when through compassion to our neighbor we think all his necessities our own."

Sadly, we've mostly abandoned the discipline of fasting from food or abstaining from good things as a way of participating in God's work in us, and we've forgotten the tradition of offering our sufferings for another's benefit, or doing without so another can have what they need.

When my older sons, Bryce Meurer, and I had our long hiking trek in Philmont, I learned that St Gregory and the abuelitas are, in fact, wise.

It was only the second full day of our trek, and I thought I might die. I was ill prepared, overweight, and exhausted. I struggled up every hill, and nearly tripped on every pebble in my path. For some reason, I decided to pray the rosary. Perhaps because I was sure this was the moment of my death. I didn't feel much better, but I didn't die, and at least I had a distraction from my misery.

So, on the next leg of our journey, I decided to try and make some good use of my "suffering," and I offered up my misery on behalf of another. As I prayed and meditated upon those mysteries, I started to feel better. I discovered I was no longer miserable. In fact, my overloaded pack seemed suddenly lighter. Before I knew it, I was skipping down the trail like a child, full of boundless energy.

I'm not guaranteeing that every time we offer up our sufferings for another, our burdens will become lighter. I do know, however, that Christ bore his cross for us out of love. I do know that my own difficulties are easier when I think less of myself, and more of others. I do know that if we remember we are dead to sin through

baptism, and live with love and compassion, we will truly be “little Christs”, Christians, bearing our cross out of love.

We have to love Jesus more than anything, take up our cross, and the third hard saying of Jesus is must renounce all our possessions if we want to be his disciples.

What does it mean to renounce all our possessions?

We know there are some called to sell everything, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. Is that how we’re all called? Is Jesus presenting some Socialist ideal like the very early church, who had all things in common, and sold whatever they had to be shared among the church?

Are we doomed to hell if we don’t renounce our possessions this way?

Saint Bede says no. He says there is a difference between renouncing all things and leaving all things. He says a few perfect people are called to leave everything, but it is for all the faithful to renounce all things. That is, to renounce *love* of them, so we hold the things of this world, but are not held by them.

In these “hard sayings” of Jesus, he is calling us to a well ordered love. Jesus is calling us to love him first, before our families, ourselves, and our stuff.

The readings from Wisdom, and the Psalm, and Saint Paul's letter speak of trust, which is the result of love.

We cannot conceive what the Lord intends, but we trust that God intends love.

We do not know what is coming, but we know that God is our refuge.

We cannot anticipate God's timing, but we know it is good, and that God's kindness will lead us to shout for joy and gladness.

Paul trusts God, and sees that God has a bigger plan.

Trust *in* God means we trust *that* God intends love, and we trust *when* God will manifest his loving kindness to us.

We can become frustrated or disappointed when things don't work out for us the way we think they should and when they should. We certainly don't want to wait.

But waiting is good for us.

When we were preparing to enter full communion with the Catholic Church, Sundays were torture. We always joined the rosary before mass. When we got to the Hail, Holy Queen, and spoke of ourselves as poor banished children of Eve, we truly felt it. We were poor banished children, unable to receive the Eucharist. Every Sunday, our desire to receive grew. At the time, I hated the wait. Now, I am so thankful for the waiting that created a yearning in our hearts to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Every time I pray that prayer, my yearning for him is refreshed.

Often, when God asks us to wait, it is so we can delight more perfectly in the goodness God has in store for us.

God's love is perfect, and God's timing is impeccable.

In the collect prayer at the beginning of mass, we prayed for true freedom. True freedom is to love and to be free from disordered love. True freedom is to place our trust in God's timing, confident in God's loving kindness.

May our love and our trust grow, and our hearts sing along with today's Communion antiphon:

Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God...