



## GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, **Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

St Luke 14. 25-33

Sunday 7 September

St Luke continues in this Sunday's gospel reading with his seemingly relentless account of Jesus' teaching which is focussed on sacrifice. Today, we have the challenging words, 'Whoever does not carry the cross cannot be my disciple.' With the other images Jesus employs, disregarding family and even life itself, it is quite clear that following Jesus has a cost. Or at least a cost in the eyes of those who do not follow or understand. Carnivores will at best not understand why vegetarians or vegans choose to forego meat or other mainstream life choices in order to follow what they feel to be right, and in the same way some will find it hard to contemplate disregarding what appears to be fundamental to a happy and fulfilled life, in order to choose a way of life which is contrary to what seems to be the accepted way.

However, the Christian faith is not a lifestyle choice like being vegetarian, tee-total or voting a certain way. Faith is not a choice of style, it is a calling of substance. It doesn't superficially point up a outward appearance or attitude, to enhance existing life, but rather it is a change of existence which leads to an enhanced life.

- What do you consider the essentials in your life?
- How prepared are you to be completely honest with yourself?
- Are the demands of faith subsidiary or integral to the way you live?
- Do you prefer to take the easy option?
- How far are you prepared to go in your discipleship?

There is no small print, no hidden clauses in Jesus' call to discipleship. Any more than being slightly pregnant, he tells his followers that they cannot be half-hearted in their following of him, and to follow him means carrying the cross. In order to do so, his followers, like Jesus himself, need to rid themselves of 'excess baggage', because there is only so much that any individual can bear. What Jesus assures us is that no one's cross is too much to bear, and that he's on hand to shoulder the burden if there's a danger of a fall.

These leads to several problems. How do we identify 'excess baggage' and 'shed it'? Is the cross an attractive enough proposition to merit such action? When we try to carry the cross, do we do so solely on our own, too proud to accept help, or else do we recognise that we're getting bogged down and that help is available?

These are questions that only we can answer in the honesty of our own hearts. But we need to realise that faith is a gift of God, not something that we earn through our own merits. Faith is a calling to which we respond, not a choice, like a lifestyle that we decide to adopt. And then we need to look closely at what Jesus says about the cross: we are told to carry it, not hold it. To 'carry' implies motion, usually forwards; to 'hold' is static. Discipleship means being in motion, not just standing still. It is not an achievement, but an action, like learning. We never cease to learn at any point in our lives; we are disciples because we are constantly learning new things about Jesus, about our faith.

- Do you consider yourself a 'disciple'?
- What does that mean for you?
- Are you prepared to learn or just be told?
- Does growing in faith ever stop?
- Is discipleship easier on one's own or together?

These are just a few simple questions and thoughts thrown up by another challenging statement from Jesus.