

## Being a disciple

On a weekend when the crisis in Syria looms large in the mind of the world, how strange that the Gospel offers us the image of a leader contemplating marching to war! The words of the Book of Wisdom “what man indeed can know the intentions of God?” could not appear to be more providential. In the gospel, Jesus is of course making a point about discipleship, and the choice which we face when such a moment of crisis or judgement arrives. The demands are high and the options are put in the starkest of terms and consequently it frightens us. It frightens us because the language is so forthright and uncompromising. *Anyone who does not hate mother or father ... cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry the cross cannot be my disciple; anyone who does not give up all his possessions cannot be my disciple.* These conditions are traumatising in the extreme, and seem impossible to accept; just what is Jesus advocating?

We should remember that Jesus’ first call to discipleship was concerned with the advent of the kingdom of God. “*Repent the kingdom of God is close at hand, believe the Good News*” but for Luke, the advent of the kingdom is marked not by a call to repentance, but by Jesus opening the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and taking upon himself the prophetic role of the ‘anointed one’. Thereafter he calls his disciples and asks them to put out into *deep water*. In other words, Jesus is calling us to a discipleship which at its very core asks for total honesty and trust in him. Such honesty and trust must in a real sense become unshackled from the bonds of human relationships, be they personal or material. The kingdom for which we work must be a kingdom in which our status is that of sons and daughters of our one Father who owns all that he has made. The ties that bind us to our earthly possessions are to be loosened to the extent that even our own lives are to be offered.

Of course we don’t achieve all of this in one fell swoop. It takes a lifetime of growing and nurturing, of failing and beginning again, and of striving to place at the centre of all we do the love that Jesus has commanded us to show. Time and time again we fail to put out into that *deep water* simply because we are afraid of what will happen to us. We are too comfortable with the things which keep us yoked to our possessions, unwilling to offer ourselves in selfless love to those in need and reluctant to respond to the cry of the afflicted and the oppressed. Yet this is the call that discipleship makes, and Jesus asks us to weigh the effects by showing us just what the stakes are and it’s a tough call.

As the world watches and waits for whatever response will be forthcoming, one thing we know for certain is that the suffering and hardship of the people of Syria will continue. Now is the time for us to act. As a parish should we not organise a collection and send off what we can to CaFOD? I know from your generosity in the past, that you have risen to such humanitarian causes with great compassion and kindness. Pope Francis has asked for a day of fasting and prayers for peace, so perhaps at mass next Friday (13<sup>th</sup>) we could all make a special effort to attend and to pray for the people of that war torn country. If we possess anything it is time, and the freedom to be able to give it up to the cause not only of justice and peace, but of our own discipleship.