

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Sep 4th 2016

Today's gospel might be hard to comprehend. What about Christianity and family values? Jesus says that whoever comes to him to be a disciple should hate his own family and even himself. But I do not hate my family. I care for my mother who's been disabled by a stroke. In fact, caring for my mother could even be considered part of my Christianity. She took care of me all her life, and now I take care of her. That seems like the Christian thing to do. It seems like the right thing to do. And I stay around here to do that. Does Jesus think I should abandon my own mother, who needs constant care now? I hope not, but maybe.

I think what Jesus is really saying is that putting anything before God is the wrong answer. Putting your family before God or putting your own interests before God is not going to get you where you want to go. If your family or your desires distract you from God, they've got to go. He says a builder calculates his plan and expenses to make sure he can accomplish his construction. A king has a battle plan and calculates his chances of success. Our goal is not a building or a battle victory. Our goal is heaven. And to get to heaven, we need the focus of a site manager or a battle general. The manager who gets distracted and does not keep focused on the building might not have a construction that will be sturdy and stand. The king who gets distracted and does not focus on his goals will lose his battle. If we get distracted and lose this battle, the ramifications are eternal. If we put anything before God, our edifice might crumble; we will not gain our victory. Our goal will slip away.

The first reading says that it is hard to know what God wants because God is in heaven and we are on earth, for now. And Jesus says that we have to set our sights on heaven. We need to stay focused on that goal and not let anything earthly be a distraction. I believe caring for my mother strengthens my faith and is not a distraction to my goal, and I'm going to do it anyway. But if anything on earth is a distraction from your heavenly goal, you need to renounce that and focus on heaven. The psalm reminds us that everyone dies, and you can't take it with you. Possessions will be no good in the end. Our earthly connections will be severed. If we let those things be a distraction here, we might not get where we want to go.

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