

A Reflection on the Gospel for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



On this **22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time** I would to take us back to the 1930's when a German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a landmark book - *the Cost of Discipleship*. He rejected what he called "cheap grace" - the idea that it doesn't matter what a person does as long as he is a nice guy.

Well, it's easy to be a nice guy - at least when things go smoothly. Bonhoeffer showed that Jesus does not call us to be "nice people." Jesus calls us to become disciples - and that may place us in opposition to the dominant culture. Bonhoeffer insists on the cost of discipleship. His life shows the cost. He could have come to America but he stayed in Germany to resist the Nazis from within. Eventually they arrested and executed him.

We need Bonhoeffer today especially as we hear Jesus say, "whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Discipleship has a cost. It may not mean arrest, torture and execution - but it could. Take up your cross and follow me, says Jesus.

We face what many call "white martyrdom." While we do not have physical attacks as do Christians in other countries, there is another persecution. Our dominant culture has become more openly antagonist to Christians - portraying us as anti-science, narrow-minded, even bigoted or hateful. Those words can sting like in the first reading where Jeremiah says, "I am an object of laughter, everyone mocks me." The derision can make young people reluctant to identify themselves as Christians.

So what should we do? We can't do much about those distortions. Still we should pray for Christians who do have a role in the media, universities and Hollywood. And in our own families seek out good reading, good entertainment and good schools for our children.

In contrast to cheap grace, Bonhoeffer writes: "Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

By costly grace we conform ourselves to the cross, not to our dominant culture. "Costly grace," concludes Bonhoeffer, "is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has."



Have a Blessed Week!

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