

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

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There is a bar in the toney North Loop section of downtown Minneapolis called Club Jäger. There was a story this weekend that it has abruptly and permanently closed. Last week it was revealed that the owner of that place had made a large donation to the failed senate campaign last year of David Duke in Louisiana. Duke is a former leader of the KKK and an avowed white supremacist. The response to the news of that donation was immediate. The majority of the employees quit. The entertainers who were booked to perform there backed out, and there was a widespread boycott of Club Jäger by patrons who said they'd never go there again. A few of the employees who stayed on to work in order to feed their families and themselves were immediately targeted by some as being Nazi sympathizers. They were taunted verbally and through electronic media and at least one of them was spit on as she walked home. All this even though none of the workers there had known anything about that donation until a newspaper disclosed it last week. Now they are all out of a job.

It can be extremely difficult sometimes to do the right thing, even when it is obvious what the right thing *is*, and when doing or saying nothing in the face of sin and evil can seem much safer.

Today's Gospel of Matthew finds Jesus saying some very difficult things to his disciples—the prediction of his own suffering and death before his resurrection, and the assurance that any follower of his is going to suffer, too. Not *maybe*; it's a guarantee. A true disciple will suffer for doing the right thing.

But it can often be easy to hear Jesus' words here and imagine the same kind of high drama that he himself experienced—public humiliation and torture and a gory crucifixion before the whole crowd, amid thunder and earthquake. But the story of the staff at Club Jäger is an excellent example of how unexpectedly and unremarkably a decision can be thrust in front of ordinary people like them—and like us...a decision to do the right thing at a heavy cost *or* to do something safer and fail at the task of discipleship.

Sometimes Christians think that part of being true to the mission of Jesus involves going out of their way to find opportunities to suffer in obvious ways. But that's not it, and Jesus never chose that way, either. The suffering found him as the result of being true to the will of his father—which involved, among other things—calling out sin and hypocrisy and injustice when it was occurring right in front of him and others kept silent. The command to his followers—i.e. to us—that we must “take up our cross, deny ourselves, and come after him”...that command, for the vast majority of us, is not to be taken literally in the form of physical martyrdom. But at the same time, neither is it to be taken in a narrow spiritually dis-embodied way either. This command demands much more of us than simply wringing our hands in dismay and saying, “Oh dear!” in the face of evil. It demands that something more than our *emotions* be put at risk in following Christ. In the case of the employees at Club Jäger, it demanded their livelihoods, at least for the moment.

For many of us, it will demand our time, our money, our courage to speak, and the risking of some friendships, perhaps our popularity or reputation; the risk of humiliation, the risk of instability in our relationships, of being misunderstood. Each of us, in our own circumstances, will recognize “the cross” when its shadow falls on us. We don't have to go looking for it.

But...as the verse from the old Marian hymn says it, “If our song had ended here our eyes would fill with tears.” Indeed so. But this isn't the end of the song. In fact it's really kind of striking that way. Jesus' instruction to his friends today in the gospel did not end with the prediction of his death. It ended with the calm assurance of his

resurrection—the most astonishing promise that could ever be—and Peter completely ignored it, “Let it never be so for you, Lord!”

What? The resurrection doesn't please you? Did you hear what was just said? Do you understand what that means?! Or are you so totally fixated on the hard part that the ending escaped your notice? Yes, the cross can be hard and the suffering can be very real. But it's not the cross that endures forever. As Paul tells us, it's the Word of the Lord that endures forever. The promise of eternity with God and with our loved ones is what will never be put at risk, if we would follow after the way that he has led. There is no other way. That didn't seem very logical to Peter when Jesus said it, and perhaps it doesn't always seem so to us either. But when Peter protested, he merited the name “Satan” in response, which suggests that Jesus regarded this message as fairly near to the heart of the mission, and that to deny this is to forsake everything—“one's very life,” as Jesus said it. We have been told what is required of us as Christian disciples: suffering, yes. Death, yes. But we have been also told what is promised to us as Christian disciples: Life eternal. May our prayer be that we may be people of courage and action now, so that we may savor the ecstasy of what awaits us up ahead.