

31 August 2014

In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds Peter and the other disciples in no uncertain terms that to follow him, to be associated with him, one needs to lay down their life, literally to lose their life for the sake of Jesus. And the one who loses their life will actually find it, will gain it in a new and definitive way. How strange to hear the challenge that to find something one needs to lose it, renounce it, let go of it in order to truly gain. And the call of Jesus is direct and uncompromising; 'If you want to be a follower of mine, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow me'.

As many of you know, on Wednesday we gathered as a family and as a community of faith to bury my mother Angela. In celebrating her life, I spoke as any child would speak with fondness about their mother – kind, loving and generous. But one theme I made clear in my homily was the faith dimension of Mum's life. She gave her life in the service of others, she lived out her baptismal commitment of faith, she was a woman of prayer who maintained her faith even in the most challenging moments of life, a woman who believed that God would walk with her and encourage her and sustain her in these challenges. And while I became a priest because of the example of the many wonderful priests of my childhood, it was actually Mum who first taught me to love God and the Church.

Today's Gospel passage is not a theory or a nice idea. It is a radical call to discipleship and it is a mighty challenge for our lives that comes to us in the flowing waters of baptism. Because baptism is the sacrament that sets up this pattern for our lives, it is our encounter with Jesus who calls us to follow him. Each of the sacraments and the whole journey of life is about responding generously, lovingly and faithfully to this call. We always admire those who seem to find within themselves this endless capacity to give to others, to give of their time, to give of their talents and to do so joyfully and with enthusiasm. This is truly life-giving, to give without counting the cost and to do so joyfully and with faith.

In today's second reading St Paul invites us to give of our lives, to model ourselves on the mind of Jesus, to discover the will of God; to respond to that radical call that comes to us in baptism. Because in giving of ourselves in the service of others actually gains us a radical freedom in

our lives. Jesus felt this unbelievable temptation to preserve his life; we know the story from Holy Week; 'Father, let this cup pass from me. Let me not suffer'. But freely, and lovingly and willingly Jesus went to the cross. And in doing so, he won for us an incredible prize, the gift of eternal life. But now he calls his disciples to do the same and, like Jesus, we feel the temptation to preserve ourselves, to turn in on ourselves and protect our needs. But the call of the Gospel is to give, to love and to serve.

I think each of us knows someone we admire for their incredible capacity to give without counting the cost, those who give with total humility, those who give with love and dedication. Our community, our church and our parishes are filled with such people. To acknowledge such service is one thing; to imitate such service is the greater challenge. As a community of faith, we gather to celebrate the Eucharist and to encounter the risen Lord who first encountered us in Baptism and who first called us in faith. Today we hear his powerful word addressed to each of us; 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them renounce themselves, take up their cross and follow me'.