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**Homily for the Twenty-Third Sunday  
in Ordinary Time: Cycle C  
Commissioning of Lay Ministers  
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

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In the Gospel today, Jesus speaks of three things which we must let get go of in life if we are to follow him. In other words, in his great wisdom, Jesus sees that there are three things to which we humans have an attachment and these things challenge our answering the call to discipleship:

1. Other people,
2. Things which keep us from suffering and
3. Our possessions.

In the first challenge, the words of Jesus seem very harsh. The word “hate” seems awfully strong... “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children..., he cannot be my follower.” Jesus is using a form of exaggeration that was common in Semitic preaching. “Hate” in this sense means **to prefer less**, not to outright detest or scorn.

We use the word “hate” in this same way. I am having a bad day on the golf course, and say, “I hate this game.” or someone says, “Oh, I hate spinach” (or squash or broccoli or whatever it is). Or “I hated that movie.”

Jesus is saying that: **NOTHING CAN GET IN THE WAY OF OUR COMMITMENT TO HIM** – not even family relationships or our friendships. Knowing that our attachment to family can be very strong, Jesus realizes that it can also get in the way of one’s call to follow. One example: “I wouldn’t want my son to become a priest or my daughter to join a religious community.” Worldly wisdom would say that in their attachment to their children, parents believe that they know what would be best for their children, including their vocation. But in this example, this is worldly thinking which goes against godly wisdom and could interfere with one’s call to discipleship. Another example would be regarding the attachment to our friends. An attachment to our friends can have a powerful influence over us and can keep us from a total commitment to Christ. Jesus knows this and he is saying that “anything and everything which gets in the way of living out our call to discipleship must be abandoned – even our attachments to our family and friends. So he prompts us to ask, **“Are we attached to another person or persons who sway or even challenge our commitment to him?”**

In the second challenge, Jesus says, **“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”** Living a life of sacrifice is part and parcel to living a Christian life. To be attached to a comfortable life goes against what it means to carry our cross.

The human experience in our culture today reveals an earthly way of thinking that rejects suffering in any way. It is too easy to seek a life which leads us away from the cross or from accepting any suffering willingly because suffering is very uncomfortable. **It is clear that Jesus is not**

**proposing for us a cozy and comfortable religion or Christian way of life.**

Our lives here on earth are to **be marked by the cross**, he tells us. It's his cross of service, his self giving, and his exemplary daily living which we are to model by the way we live and by the choices we make. The wisdom of the world speaks a message that suffering is bad, worthless and to be avoided at all costs. The wisdom of Jesus says that suffering is valued, has meaning, and that our willing acceptance of it leads us to heaven. **How is our attachment to the easy life being challenged by Jesus today? How is our attachment to a worldly wisdom or worldly ways keeping us from a life of sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom?**

Jesus ends today with the third challenge, saying, ***"In the same way, anyone who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."*** In our nation today... in our culture... in this wealthiest nation in the world, we are **smothered literally** by consumerism and materialism. We have far more than we know what to do with. Most of us have far more than we need. We are constantly be bombarded with marketing that entices us to obtain more. We are attached to our possessions and often times they have power over us. If we can't say "no" to more, or say "yes" to giving more away, then perhaps our possessions have more power over us than we think. Jesus invites us to answer the question, **"Is our attitude toward our possessions or our resources keeping us from committing ourselves to Jesus' way of life – a life of sacrifice and self giving? Do they bring us a divided heart?"**

**True disciples must renounce anyone or anything that stands in the way of a total commitment to Jesus.** We cannot be attached to anyone or anything **because it gets in the way of or diminishes** our response to follow Jesus.

Luke is writing to a Gentile community that would be upper middle class, well educated – a Greek-influenced community that would be very much aware of and participating in pagan practices. **For St. Luke, a pagan is a person who integrates his life with the ongoing culture; whereas a Christian is one who feels uncomfortable in a splintered world.**

The two parables Jesus gives us today suggest we should not enter into discipleship too casually. We are not joining a social club or a religion for the upwardly mobile. Jesus knew that the choices and lifestyles that family and friends adopt most often are the choices and lifestyles that have been passed on – ones that have been inherited from former generations. So from his point of view, being a disciple does not happen automatically because we are born into a family that is Christian or Catholic. All through his life Jesus made deliberate, daily decisions about how he would respond to people's worldly practices and the religious beliefs of his day. He asks us to follow his example.

But at this moment of our lives, who can claim to have made such a total self-emptying gift? Certainly not I. How hard it can be sometimes! From the Book of Wisdom we heard, ***"For the deliberations of mortals is timid, and unsure are our plans."*** How often do we just want to give in to the easy way of life? It is so much easier to take the "road most traveled" instead of the "road less traveled."

The life of a disciple must be calculating, deliberate and focused about what we are choosing because it often leads us away from security and comfort, and can be lonely at times. Jesus tells us, "Think it over before you make a commitment to me. Then when you do, make it a total giving of yourselves."

Those to be commissioned lay ministers have chosen the “road less traveled” and entered deliberately into a focused formation process. You have spent these last few years preparing, and growing in your relationship and commitment to the Lord. But know that it is not the last step. It really is another beginning. Each day, as you continue to commit yourself to a life of faith, the Lord will lead you deeper into a life of service and ministry. The Lord will call each of you into his ministry in a different way. You do not all have the same interests or the same talents, but you all have the same mission. Like all disciples, the Lord will stretch you and lead you to places you dare not go on your own. Do not be afraid to go there!

For the vast majority of us, becoming a disciple is a daily process. Little by little we weigh our choices and carefully act. Our cooperation with God’s saving work means that we are clear about what it will entail. We plan how we will serve the kingdom. Through prayer, we will always seek God’s counsel. And above all, we are compelled to pick up our cross and follow. What constitutes life is not what I own or my standing in family and society – it is Jesus. So everything has to be ordered to that reality.

**AND THE GOOD NEWS:** we never have to go it alone. Jesus walks beside us encouraging us to never give up – to seek the ways of heaven. He is encouraging us tonight. We who have been baptized are called to give witness to Christ’s love and mercy – to give our own testimony on Jesus’ behalf to a world not much different than the world in which Jesus lived.

As commissioned lay ministers, your testimony must be at the heart of your life and ministry. The world so desperately needs people who are not afraid to give this testimony to our secular world, to stand up for the moral teachings of the Church, to fight against the injustices which plague God’s people and our country and the world, and at the same to show the power of the Lord’s love and mercy.

Just as all who minister in the name of Jesus face challenges and often times, even opposition, there will be challenges ahead of you as well. Always cling to the truth you have learned and stay close to the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ will be your strength as you minister in his Church. The Lord will always guide your steps with his mighty arm and with the power of his grace, and strengthen you with his Spirit, so that you will not falter through weariness, but remain faithful in trust. In doing so, you can do anything he asks of you.

Entrust yourself to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the dispenser of every grace that God grants us, and she will lead and guide you.

As you are commissioned as lay ministers this evening, I congratulate you. You have dedicated yourselves and sacrificed much in seeking the truths of the Catholic faith and in seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord so that you may minister in the name of the Church in the Diocese of Rapid City and help others to come to know the beauty and the graces which come from following the Lord’s call to discipleship. We need, more than ever, men and women and children who are on fire for their faith in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all.