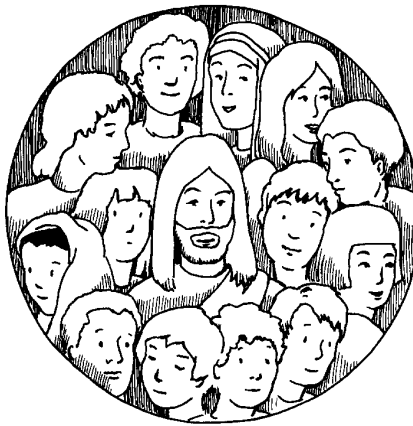


# The Challenge of Discipleship



*We are not born Christians; we become Christians.* This statement is taken from a catechism used in the first centuries of the Church. In fact, *being Jesus' disciple* requires a choice, a mature decision and is the message of the Gospel passage this Sunday. Many people had followed Jesus and he challenged them with this invitation: *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37). And if this was not clear enough, Christ continued: *Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple* (Lk 14:27). In the Greek text of this passage, there are variations on the verb (which can be translated as: to go, to come, to walk) and provides for several options with prepositions. Thus we may walk *with* Jesus, walk *toward* him, with the goal of choosing to walk *behind* him.

We can learn a great deal about Jesus as a person without deciding to become a disciple. And even if I strive to respond to Jesus' call, I must be aware that this is not a one-time offer. In fact this choice implies a lifelong commitment, perseverance and the willingness to endure life and death situations that Jesus himself experienced. Could Jesus have placed the bar too high and perhaps find himself alone on this journey? Christ was being realistic. He gave us two examples: the builder who wants to construct a tower and the king who wants to wage war. In both cases, he cautions us to think before we act and honestly evaluate our resources and capacity to bring our projects to successful completion. We can apply these same measures to our lives as Christians. We can call ourselves Christians without becoming Jesus' disciple. But we can also, and this is preferable, experience our faith and desire to move forward guided by the Gospel values. This requires more effort and endurance, somewhat like people who choose to remain physically fit by exercising regularly and watching their weight.

As we follow Jesus, our life-long journey enables us to grow in faith. When Christ asks us to make this serious commitment, we shouldn't be discouraged and think this is impossible. Instead we consider our desire for improvement and self-investment in complete freedom as inspired by the Gospels.

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Translated by Honore Kerwin Borrelli