

## **TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2018**

Have you ever wanted to take a walk with Jesus? To sing, "O, what a friend I have in Jesus." Or perhaps you remember the Merle Haggard song: "And he walks with me, and talks with me, And he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there None other has ever known."

Somehow this nice, warm friendly walk is not what I hear in today's gospel. In last week's gospel, Jesus had made the first prediction of his passion, death and resurrection and told his followers to take up their cross and follow him. This could not have been too encouraging and the disciples probably let it pass by. We skip over the next scene in Mark's gospel of the transfiguration on the mountain with Peter, James and John present.

Today we pick up Jesus with his disciples, presumably both men and women, walking on their own in Galilee. He is trying to have an intimate conversation with them and explain to them his real vocation. So he again predicts the end days, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to human hands and they will kill him, and after three days the Son of Man will rise."

Mark then comments "...they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him." No questions, no sympathy, no protest.

Perhaps they were just shaking their heads in hopes that he'd come to his senses when they finally sat down in the shade. Do you wonder why they were afraid? Earlier in the gospel, people responded with fear when Jesus calmed the storm, when they witnessed the exorcism of a man, when Jesus walked on the water. In all of these cases, it was Jesus' awesome power that led them to fear. Now it would seem that his vulnerability led them to fear. Jesus' message that the powers of evil would muster all their strength against him was the most frightening message of all for disciples who had not yet made this perspective on the kingdom their own.

And what happens next? Once in Capernaum, he asks them what they were arguing about on the way? They again are silent, but this time because they were discussing among themselves which one of them was the greatest. Can you believe this? How could they be so dense? But then how could the successors of the apostles, our bishops, have been so dense too in clutching on to power and not facing the truth in humility and courage? After 2000 years we are still learning who Jesus really is, what he asks of us in walking with us in life.

And then the story really hits us. In this age of the abuse of children, Jesus takes a child, places his arms around it, and instructs his disciples that the child will teach them about the kingdom of God. "You want to be important? Here's what important looks like." Sadly, many disciples of Jesus in our own day have preferred power and abused their power.

Thankfully, the story of the church has also had its heroes, those who understood Jesus and his mission. The communion of Saints is one of the most consoling doctrines that we embrace.

Let me tell of you one of one Christ-like person whom I have admired, whom I would have liked to follow if I thought I had the courage and strength to do so.

About forty years ago I went to Boston to hear a talk by Jean Vanier. At that time he had already founded a number of L'Arche communities, places of love and caring for people with developmental disabilities, places where the workers learn from the residents. It was in a L'Arche community in Canada that Henri Nouwen found redemption for his tortured soul in the last ten years of his life. Twenty years after hearing him in Boston, I again heard him talk in Rome. He was the same strong, humble, Christ-centered individual. One student asked him about politics in the church. He refused to get involved and only would talk about the gospel. Today he is ninety years old and still lives in the original L'Arche community in France. He has founded 37 such communities. No fanfare, no celebrity status. In 1971 he also founded "Faith and Life," a group to work with people with disabilities.

If he had asked me the first time I met him, "Follow me," I would have had a hard time saying no. He is a magnetic, deeply spiritual but practical person. His Catholic faith is simple and profound. He is truly Christ-like.

Jean Vanier has written many books. I would like to share a few quotes of his:

"I am struck by how sharing our weakness and difficulties is more nourishing to others than sharing our qualities and successes."

"One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing."

"All of us have a secret desire to be seen as saints, heroes, martyrs. We are afraid to be children, to be ourselves."

"A community is only being created when its members accept that they are not going to achieve great things, that they are not going to be heroes, but simply live each day with new hope, like children, in wonderment as the sun rises and thanksgiving as it sets. Community is only being created when they have recognized that the greatness of a human is to accept one's insignificance, one's human condition and the earth, and to thank God for having put in a finite body the seeds of eternity which are visible in small and daily gestures of love and forgiveness. The beauty of humanity is in this fidelity to the wonder of each day."

After looking at Jean Vanier as well as at many of you who strive to be faithful daily, I can perhaps walk with Jesus, unafraid of where we are going, and the example he gives us. I want to be faithful to Jesus and to his beloved people.

**Fr. Timothy J. Joyce, OSB, STL**