

The Servant

Founder's Forum

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Counting the cost

Jesus made two points clearly: there are no disciples without discipline and no saints without sacrifice. Being a disciple is costly, risky and demanding. Those in religious life are called to calculate the risk, count the cost, and carry the cross.

Jesus warned his followers there would be cost in following him; that there would be alienation from family and friends and condemnation by peers. For those who decide to enter the religious life these words ring out as true echoes of experience. How many of us have found it so? How many friends ask "why?" when they are told our plans to seek membership in a religious community?

The follower of Jesus must calculate the risk as well. Love costs. The more love you give the greater the cost. Remember Jesus: he died because he loved so much. This truth, too, finds a home in our world today. Take a stand for the merely good and true and be prepared for criticism and ridicule. Take a stand on being a Christian and be prepared for worse! Sometimes we gloss over the cost of being a Christian. We pass over the hard sayings of Jesus and ignore them while trying to be Christians. Some find all of it too hard and drift away.

Sometimes, too, we make carrying the cross seem easy. We hang crosses on cords around our necks; we pin bright, shiny crosses to our lapels and blouses; we place them all over our churches, on rooftops, floors, and walls. But at what cost? Is this what Jesus meant? "Take up your cross; and come, follow me!" He was asking the disciples to stand up and be counted in a crisis. He was asking them to forget themselves in the service of God. People cannot build Christian lives without carrying Christ's high concerns willingly on their shoulders. Each of us assumes the responsibility. Each of us takes up the cross and becomes a follower of Jesus.

This happens at baptism. In a simple act, a cross inscribed at most in oil—not wood, not stone, not silver or gold—traced by a thumb on our foreheads, marks us as Christ's own, for ever.

—RTB

For Holy Cross Day

Lift high the cross

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. John 12.32

We cannot look at the cross without thinking of Jesus. But step back in time and consider what the cross meant to the people who lived in Jerusalem. The cross was a Roman death sentence.

According to John, Jesus foretold that he would be "lifted up from the earth," and that he would then draw everyone to himself. By these words Jesus indicated the kind of death he was to suffer. If you read on, John says that the crowd answered, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains for ever." (12.34) This challenge becomes a foretelling of the Resurrection of the Lord. Death and Resurrection are linked.

We must all die daily to sin, for that is why our Lord died for us: so we can live with Christ in his Resurrection until our own homecoming to that heavenly kingdom, which was promised to us by Christ's death on the cross. By his death on that cross our Lord and Savior took away all of our sins, both known and unknown, things done and left undone. As John says, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become

sons of light." (12.36) So we must all understand that the cross is the way for us to travel also! Christ has promised this to all. The cross, though seeming to offer only death, is light and life.

We must believe that Christ accepted this degrading death to clear the slate for all humankind—in the past, in the present and for all time to come. In John 3.3-13, the conversation revolves around whether salvation is possible through keeping the Law. But Jesus moves the discussion to a different level. Salvation in the kingdom of God requires a new birth, which is also a birth "from above," from heaven itself, a birth through the operation of the Spirit. Such a birth is possible only in the Son of man and God—which

is Jesus Christ himself, the one who died on that holy cross, for our sins.

As I look back, I find a deeper meaning of the cross. I find myself attached to the cross in both a spiritual and a physical way. First the spiritual: it is the wood that Christ had to endure to give redemption and Resurrection to my rebirth in the Spirit. Second, the physical, wooden cross—the one I wear around my neck—is there to remind me that I must die to myself and live for others: "*Soli Deo Gloria, To God Alone the Glory.*"

It was in 1969 that our community was founded on Holy Cross Day. With vision and in the same spirit a man took upon himself to spread the love of the holy cross by becoming a servant of servants; to Jesus our Lord and Savior, and to the church. Our community wears a cross marked with those words: *Soli Deo Gloria*. Just as Christ was proved servant of God by enduring the cross, so too, we as brothers and sisters are servants of Christ and the church.

So whatever the trouble in your life may be, look to the cross of Jesus Christ. Think of how our Lord was lifted up on the cross for all to see—and to save all humankind both then, now, and for evermore.

Let us always remember that Christ was born a human, like we were! Christ had a childhood, as we did! Christ had his troubles and conflicts in life, as we do! Christ was judged, as we are at times! Christ was lifted on the cross, died and was buried on the same day, as was the Jewish tradition. His Resurrection was on the third day—and so too will we be raised. We will pass from this world of human authorities to a higher kingdom where there is no pain or grief. We will be home with our Creator, our God. We will be with God our Father, and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, one with them in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We have followed the way of the cross. Yes, we will have passed through creation, birth, life, and death and have returned home for ever and ever. Amen.

Br Bernard Francis LaReau is in annual vows in the Brotherhood and is the community's director of companions. He is a teacher of handicapped children in the Madison WI public school system. He serves St. Luke's Church, Madison, as well as the Diocese of Milwaukee, in a variety of capacities.

For the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Wrestling match

...do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. --2 Timothy 4.5

How many of us have wrestled with problems so great that we felt we were doomed if we did not find an answer? I'm afraid that if we say No, then we are liars. Who has not, in some way or other, had such a mental wrestling match? We talk to ourselves, we think, we pray, and we wrestle with our consciences, to seek a solution to our problems, whatever they may be.

The Scriptures for this day speak about this wrestling, this seeking out a solution to problems. There are three things we do: we wrestle; we determine; and we persevere.

For a few moments let us look at ourselves and what we do. Let's start with the youngest, the infant, since that's where it all begins. Have you every watched a child, perhaps a month old, trying to lift its head in the carriage or crib? It is quite an effort, this lifting of the head—a wrestling match. The child wants to look around and see what's going on. For a while the infant doesn't succeed, but with determination and perseverance the child gets stronger. The head is held erect and the infant can suddenly do something important.

Let's move on several months. The same infant is in a playpen. The child wants to stand and tries so hard—another wrestling match. The baby pulls on the bars of the playpen and maybe just gets a little way up and boom! down it goes. Perhaps the child cries out in frustration and we come

running into the room to see if it's all right. This goes on for several days. The little limbs get stronger and eventually the child is standing.

You know how the rest of it goes. Before you know it they are walking—first holding on to the sides of the playpen, and then come the first steps—to the child a wrestling match with themselves. It was with determination and perseverance that it won out. For the child it is a victory.

Let's move on what seems hundreds of years, and the infants are now highschoolers. Oh, is that an age! We really are wrestling now! "Do I study for that big test on Monday or do I go to the Friday night dance?" Or the football game? Do we say, "Well, I can stay home from church on Sunday and study all day"? What do we do? We wrestle with our con-sciences and we seek a solution. We don't want to tell our folks because if we do we will get grounded for the weekend. And of course that would be disastrous since it's the biggest dance or the most important football game of the year. What to do? What to do? Again the wrestling match and all that goes with it, until we find the solution. Am I right so far?

Let's move on another hundred years, or so we think. We are older now, wiser (with a question mark), yet we still have problems. We thought we left that all behind. We have problems; boy, do we have problems! We are constantly wrestling with our consciences.

Religious have problems. They too must make decisions. Is this what God wants me to do? A wrestling match, won only through determination, and perseverance. I am to make my life vows next August. I am wrestling with my inner self. Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life? Is this what God calls me to do for the rest of my life? It's a quandary. What to do? What to do?

All of us have similar situations in our lives. We constantly seek. We wrestle with a problem, we find an answer and, if we are determined and we persevere, then we get rid of the problem and we have the victory.

In Genesis there is a wrestling match. Jacob would not let go until he received a blessing. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells of a woman who kept coming to a judge. The judge wouldn't make a ruling, but the woman was determined and persevered. She continued to wrestle, and finally the judge gave in. Through her determination and perseverance she won the victory.

In Paul's Second Letter to Timothy we are reminded about wrestling, determination and perseverance. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,... preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching." This speaks to all of us: "Always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry."

Look at your parish. There is much to do. Take the words of Paul—wrestle with them—pray to God over them—be determined to help out in one or more of the programs. Once you have chosen the ones you feel you can do, commit yourselves to them. It is not just the rector's job or a job

for a handful of people. It is for all of us. We are charged to fulfil our ministry.

The ministry of the laity is not fulfilled by just sitting in the pew once a week for a service. The ministry of the laity is fulfilled when we take part by being active in the work of the whole church. Don't sit back and let someone else do it for you. You do it, wrestle with your conscience, be determined, persevere and do it. Do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

This sermon was originally preached on Sunday, October 19, 1986 at Christ Church, Suffern NY, by Br William E Bunting, BSG, who died on October 12, 1988, in the fourteenth month of his life profession of vows.



Kerygma Korner

God first: A tithing catechism / Part 2

What does the New Testament say about the tithe?

Very little, since the legal and ethical principle was already well established under Jewish law and tradition.

Doesn't Jesus criticize the Pharisees for tithing?

Let's look at that passage carefully for a moment, since it is often quoted out of context. (Matt 23.23-24) Jesus is facing off against the Pharisees in a series of very pointed accusations. The theme of this whole chapter is that the Pharisees have gotten things out of perspective and proportion.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

Doesn't that mean that instead of tithing the Pharisees should have done works of mercy and righteousness?

Not at all! Notice two things. First, Jesus says, "These you ought to have done"—meaning the works of justice, mercy, and *faith*—"without neglecting the others"—that is, the tithes on the herbs. It isn't a case of tithe *or* do good, but of tithe *and* do good. Second, Jesus doesn't say, "You pay tithes on *wheat*," but on "mint and dill and cummin." The Pharisees weren't farmers; they were city men, lawyers—but they still had their window boxes or backyard gardens for herbs and spices, and they were careful to pay the tithe on these, since this was "all the produce of their land"—such as it was. This tithe was a very small amount; a few teaspoons at best. Think of the difference between a year's supply of bread and a year's supply of Tabasco Sauce, and you'll see what I mean. The Pharisees' problem, also summed up in the image of the gnat and the camel, is that they lack proportion. They are fastidious in small things like paying the tithe on their window-box seasonings, yet ignore important matters of justice, mercy and faith. This passage really isn't about tithing, but about proportion and balance in life.

Is there anything else in the New Testament about the tithe?

Not really. But that doesn't mean that there isn't plenty of talk about money! In fact, money is one of the subjects about which Jesus had the

most to say. Again and again he emphasizes that money is to be used to do good, not simply put away, buried like the talent in the ground, or used simply to build bigger barns. God works through material things, like money, loaves and fishes, bread and wine, a human body nailed to a cross—and through us.

St Paul makes the same point, that faithfulness is shown in doing good with the things one has, "not reluctantly or under compulsion," but cheerfully (2 Cor 9.7). Generosity is one of the most admired traits in the Bible. The generosity of the early apostolic church, in the various Christian communities scattered about the Mediterranean, shows that money was regarded primarily as a means to do good, and as a concrete way for God's grace and activity through the Spirit to be effective in the world.

The main point the New Testament makes about money is that wherever your money is, your heart is there too. We are to be trusting—like the boy at the feeding of the multitudes who gave up his bread and fish, and fed thousands; and we are to be generous and openhanded. The Bible makes it clear that the tithe is only the beginning. The biblical tithe is the *minimum* standard of giving—which is what the General Convention affirmed in its 1982 resolution.

—T S H

In the next part of this series we will examine the history of the tithe in the apostolic and later church.

Community notes

Province II

The New York area Lutheran/Episcopal Dialogue committee met at the Episcopal Church Center in June, and Br James E Teets assisted at the noon ecumenical joint eucharistic celebration.

On June 11 Bishop Paul Moore, Jr was sent on vacation prior to his retirement in a festive evensong at the Cathedral of St John the Divine. His 17 years as Bishop of New York were celebrated and honored by testimonials and liturgical expressions. We joined with over seventy-five members of other religious communities, and the thousands who packed the cathedral on a glorious and sunny afternoon. The service was spectacular and the reception which followed provided the opportunity to meet old and new friends in an joyful atmosphere.

Br William Francis Jones and novice Sr Clare Connell took part in the annual Commemoration Day at the Mendham convent of the Community of St John Baptist.

The Brotherhood Council, meeting at the House of the Redeemer, New York City, approved the life professions of Brs Charles Kramer and Laurence Andrew Keller, and the first professions of Br Alan Andrew Speer and Sr Clare. Postulants Roger-Michael Goodman and Damian Curtis Kellum were approved for reception into the novitiate; and three aspirants, the Rev Christopher T Connell, Ronald S MacGregor, and Richard J Lorino were accepted as candidates for admission to the postulancy.

The first simultaneous Vocations Day Retreats were held in Provinces II and West. The east coast retreat was held at the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, NYC, led by Br Stephen Storen, director of vocations. All of the members in Province II were on hand for at least part of the day (except Br Christopher Stephen Jenks, see below) and inquirers from as far away as Philadelphia and Baltimore came to explore the search process. In addition to meditations on the Brotherhood's *Rule* and interpretation of religious life, there was ample time for discussion, the Daily Office, and the Holy Eucharist, which was celebrated by the Rev Christopher T Connell (a candidate for postulancy). The second part of the Vocations Day is described below.

Province West

The Cathedral of St James, Chicago, was the site of the Province West Vocations Day Retreat. This was to be an opportunity for people in the area to meet and talk with representatives from a number of Episcopal religious communities. In addition to the Brotherhood, two orders were able to send representatives and we were happy to have Sr Rose Mary, SSM, and Dom Leo, OSB, with us; many other communities sent literature for distribution. The day was brought into focus by meditations delivered by our assistant director of vocations, Br Christopher Stephen. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated by Br Edward Ramón Riley. Other Gregorians present included Brs Thomas Joseph Ross and Bernard Francis LaReau, novice Br Alan Andrew, postulant Roger-Michael, and Companion Jerry T Vogt.

The province had a quarterly gathering at Br Bernard Francis' home in Madison WI, including a cookout and a trip to the World of Miniature Buildings, built by his brother and sister-in-law, Mr & Mrs Paul LaReau. The Feast of St John Baptist was observed with a house eucharist. Companions Jerry Vogt, Lillian Waites, and Fidel Flores, and Bernard Francis' "Uncle John" Armstrong, joined the brothers for this service.

Province III

Br Michael David Elvestrøm had one of his etchings in the Sacred Art 200 exhibit held at the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum, sponsored by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The exhibit of 60 works was chosen from among 960 entries from forty-five states and fifteen countries. Michael David will be moving 'West' from Province III, as he takes up a teaching position at the Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, in Natchitoches.

Before leaving Tampa, he attended a service for the Community of the Holy Comforter, at Good Shepherd Church, Lake Wales. At the service, Bishop William H Folwell received the vows of Sr Jean, and Sr Charlene was received and clothed as a novice. Sr Nancy Elizabeth, founder of CHC, was also present, as was Sr Louise, ASSP, visiting from the Catonsville MD convent. In the photo (1 to r) are Srs Jean, Nancy Elizabeth, Charlene, Louise, Bishop Folwell, and Br Michael David.

