

“Are you strong enough?” Luke 9:51-62

51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village.

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go. 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:51-62)

This is a challenging text. Very challenging. Not for a preaching. No, for a listening. We have warnings before movies that they are rated PG13 or PG15. I'm not sure how to rate this sermon.

Let's go through this text together. We read that Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knew why He had come down from the Father and born as a man; to go and fight a battle against sin and the devil which no one else could fight. Jesus knew what would be a price for His victory. His rejection, sufferings and death on the cross.

It required a lot of determination and will power to set to do this.

At that time His disciples still had a very different understanding about what Jesus mission is and what kind of Saviour He is. They had seen His unbelievable power to heal all sicknesses, to raise the dead, to cast out demons and even to silence the nature when it caused troubles.

Jesus had the power to do everything. Now we read that as they were going through Samaria some of the villages didn't welcome them. What did Jesus disciples say? **“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”**

Not that they could do it on their own, but by invoking Jesus authority. As He gave them power to cast out demons and to heal the sick, He could give them the power to call fire down from heaven to destroy these 'stubborn and hostile' villagers.

That's so familiar reaction. Can you relate to that? It is much easier to react this way. When someone is hostile towards us, we want to repay with the same. Thanks be to God, we don't have a power to call fire from heaven!

May be these villagers really deserved this kind of 'greeting' to remind them who is who. But what Jesus did? Jesus turned and rebuked them. For "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17-19)

Jesus never ever uses His divine power against any of us. His patience was and is incredible. If we had this kind of power, we would almost certainly go the road of cleansing this world from all the evil ones. Even those outside of the Church often reproach God that He doesn't destroy those ... evil people out there.

God sees that enemy is not among us. No, enemy is within us. Within each of us. That's our sin which, having a chance, from time to time shows its ugly face also in our lives.

Jesus sees all of us as patients. As sick with sin. This sickness like mental sicknesses does not allow us to see the reality as it is. We see it in our distorted manner. He sees it clearly.

To be angry and to want to destroy someone who does wrong is similar to wanting to destroy someone who has lost his mind and simply doesn't understand what really is going on. This is our situation. We don't understand clearly neither who we are, nor what is wrong with us. If Jesus had come to judge, He would have to destroy all of us.

He didn't come to judge us, but to destroy sin. He took this sickness upon Himself and went into death to be able to give us antidote against the death. In our Baptism, when we are made members of His body, the Church, we receive this antidote. As a preventive shot. He took upon Him the whole strength of sin and the death so that we can receive it in our Baptism in easy form.

Have you heard people saying that Christians are judgmental? Sometimes they may be right. But we need to understand what essentially is going on. Jesus came not to judge, but to save. Save from what?

He came to show us the seriousness of our sickness. It is much more serious than we can imagine. It is not something we can overcome. To overcome it the life of the Son of God was required.

When Christians speak with others about sin, it is not to judge. When doctor says that you have very bad test results and if you won't act immediately and with undivided attention, you will die; is this doctor judgmental? Was Christ judgmental when he said that if you won't repent then you won't escape the death. Is He being judgmental?

If we see the symptoms of this deadly sickness, i.e. sin, in people around us, is this judgmental to point to the doctor and to the medicine of life which is offered for free? Think for yourselves...

"Whoever believes in what Christ tells us and accepts His help is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (John 3:18)

This is a scary reality. Ultimately, people are condemned to death not because of their sins. Their sins still could be forgiven, they still can be healed. They are condemned because they refuse to believe the diagnoses, because they reject the Doctor and the medicine of life that is offered to them for free.

A diagnosis is not judging. An offer to help is not condemnation. There is no one other to blame. The forgiveness is here. Always. The Divine Doctor is waiting for all the people to come to the truth. He desires everyone to be saved. He hasn't come to judge, but to save. These are only our sinful hearts which refuse to believe Him and accept His help, that condemn us.

Then we come to three short dialogues which shows us what are the things we need to consider if we want to be Jesus disciples.

“As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

The man got attracted by Jesus teaching and His power. I’ll follow you! Sure. But do you know what is the cost of following me? Do you know what kind of leader I am?

As the first part of today’s reading showed, Jesus is not a kind of leader who will destroy all who are against Him. He could, but He never would. We are called to be strong in the same way. He is a rejected leader. He is a leader who is not understood, one who going to be killed. That’s His way to bring us salvation. He suffers for those who reject Him so that they can be saved. This is what we are called to do.

“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” These words are not just analogies from the animal world. These were designations used for Roman oppressors and rulers from other nations.

They all lived well in the land of Israel. They had quite a comfortable ‘holes’ and ‘nests’, but Jesus as a true king of Israel was rejected and persecuted. Ironically, by those whom He came to rescue.

Do you want to follow this leader? Following won’t bring you victory over your enemies. It won’t bring fire upon them. It may occasionally. But more often it means that you will humbly bear their sins, dealing with peoples with patience and praying for their healing. It is difficult and requires a lot of strength and determination. Are you strong enough?

We need to see also other perspective. As Jesus is the most perfect and most powerful leader, He could be looking for the most perfect and fitting followers. That would be human expectations. He didn’t. He came to call everyone to be His follower.

It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter what you have done. Follow me! He is not looking for perfect followers. Otherwise we wouldn’t be here. He is looking for each of us. As we are. Remember, He is God Creator. He doesn’t need to find a perfect followers. He can create them.

That is what Jesus does. He takes us, by the Holy Spirit and His word He reshapes us, to make into a new creation. And when He will return in His glory, He will make us complete. He will give us new bodies, as perfect as they can be, without sin, without suffering, prepared for the eternal feast in His kingdom. This is what Jesus does for His followers.

Then Jesus said to another man, **“Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”**

This is too much, we may think. Let this poor fellow bury his father. Don’t be so harsh, Jesus! We need to understand what this saying meant for those who heard it. We know that Middle Eastern society has always been very patriarchal.

The role of fathers is still incredibly important there even today. There was a saying “to bury my father” which meant to live in obedience to what traditions require as long as a father is still

alive. When this man said ‘let me go and bury’, we could translate it as ‘let me live according the expectations of my culture and only then, when I’m done with them, then I’ll follow you.’

We also have so many expectations. We barely have a time to fulfil all of them. When you are a child, you need to have a time to be child, to play. Right? When you are teenager, you need to be involved in so, so many activities. If you do so you can be something, if not, then who are you? Right?

When you are young adult, you need to study for carrier, to have fun and to establish yourself in life. Then you can be proud of yourself and feel accepted by society and peers. If you don’t put these things as the highest priorities you may end up as a loser. You also need to start your family, to raise your children... these all are very important things.

‘Jesus, I’ll do all of this and then I’ll follow you.’ Right? But, when you grow old, you don’t have much energy left, you need to take things easy, you deserve the rest. True. Then you are dead... and it’s too late to follow Jesus. Not Christ, but your unbelief condemns us and excludes from the fellowship with true God.

Just think about it. Who is the one who calls? It is God Himself. He wasn’t too busy to became man, to live as one of us so that only we can learn more about Him. He wasn’t too busy to die on the cross, not because of His sins, but because of ours. Because of yours. He found a time.

He is still not too busy to send His Gospel message to everyone, telling about our deadly sickness and graciously offering us healing. The healing which He purchased by His own blood. But people are too busy to accept it.

We can have this enormous privilege to be in the same mission with Jesus, the Son of God. “Go and proclaim the Kingdom of God”. Share with people in your life that all the authority in the heaven and on the earth is given to Christ. The Gospel of Jesus are not some principles for a good living, it is a historical truth, the reality which everyone will have to face.

Share that He had not come to judge and condemn, but to save and to heal. This is what we so often misunderstand. He is gracious God, who is so incredibly patient with us. He loves us and waits for us regardless of our ingratitude, of our total misperception of reality and our ‘self-made’ busyness. He is enormously patient... but when we are dead, it’s too late.

We need to see clearly what is this choice between... on the one hand, self-designed cultural norms.. which require and require and require... and which will never give what we expect from them. They won’t give us dignity, they won’t give us true joy and peace, nor security, nor status, nor meaning for our lives.

And between true God... who gives and gives and gives us everything, even His own life. He wants to give us much more than we can imagine, much, much more. And He actually can do it and has a pretty good track record of keeping His promises. Just follow Him.

Let’s see the third dialogue. **“Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

Again, we could think – Jesus, let the guy say “bye-bye”! Don’t be so categorical! We know even from our own culture that a polite way to say “bye-bye” when you want to leave is to say something like ‘with you kind permission I’m leaving.’ Thus we kindly give a host authority to release us.

What this man actually said was – ‘I want to go back and ask if my family will give me permission to leave and to go with you... rejected Saviour who is about to suffer and be killed.’

What is implied in his words - that he wants to put the decision on his family. They quite obviously won't let him do it. He puts the authority to make this decision on someone else. In fact, he says that he will listen more to someone else and not to Jesus.

What are our ultimate authorities? When God to whom we owe everything, every moment of our lives says to us - ‘follow me and I'll bless you and I will make you a blessing for others’ – whom do we listen? Him, family, society, peers, culture?

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

That's a vivid analogy. Most of you have some experience working with the soil, or even plowing. Can you look back when you need to go straight? Looking back would make furrows crooked and can damage everything you attempt to do.

You cannot follow Christ and follow other authorities. Then you are not fit for the service in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is not, listen carefully! - Jesus is not saying that it is not important to do the things which we do to life in our culture. Different activities are important, studies, sport, careers, family, children, businesses, rest, entertainment, etc. All of these are important and objectively necessary things.

But if you want to follow Jesus then you need to approach *them all* as a follower of Jesus. You do them all, but differently. Then in everything you do you try to live as a follower of Jesus.

Serving others, putting others' interests above yours, being patient with others, bearing their weaknesses and shortcomings, and above all - telling them the truth about our deadly sickness, about the Divine Doctor and the gift of life that He has purchased for us paying such terrible price. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

Did you notice that none of these dialogues had a conclusion? What did these ‘to be disciples’ do? It is not revealed. Why? Because this is a question each of us needs to answer ourselves. This is Jesus inviting you! You!

Are we strong enough to be Jesus disciples? Are we? Let us be realistic. No. We are too weak. We are still too weak because of our sickness. And Jesus knows it. He knows what we are capable of. He knows that is not easy for us. It requires a lot of strength and determination. That's why we can say that this sermon is rated as PG. These are heavy tasks.

That's why if we want to follow Jesus we continually need to receive His power. We need to keep receiving His life giving medicine.

Here it is – the Holy Communion! Purchased by Jesus' life and sufferings. Prepared for you. To make you strong and to help you to be a true disciple of Jesus. Come, take it, eat it and drink it and be strong in Christ. When we are together with Him, all things are possible.

Amen.