

“The worst advertiser ever” Luke 14:25-33

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

You all know how advertising industry works, right? They try to appeal to what people desire, covet, crave for. If you want to sell something you try to make it really attractive, appealing, you make people believe that if they won't get what you offer, they will never be happy and at peace. Ever.

Do you know who was the worst advertiser ever? Who had a really precious thing, something without what we, indeed, will never be happy and at peace, and who still failed, totally failed to make any sales. At the end of His life, He has persuaded ... almost no one.

You obviously know who I am talking about. Yes, our dear God and Savior Jesus Christ. He had brought into this world the gift of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life in the presence of the Holy God. But His whole marketing campaign totally failed.

In today's text we can clearly see why. Just listen to how He was trying to attract people's attention, how He tried to appeal to what all people desire, and it will become clear why His whole campaign failed.

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” How about that for a slogan! Hate everyone, even yourself, or... you can't be my disciple.

And as if that wasn't hard enough, here is more: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” It was like saying: “You are hoping for easy life? Ha, not here! With me you will learn what real hardship is.”

Finally, as if these two were not enough to scare away everyone, here comes the final strike, what we could call, hitting under the belt. That is, touching the most

sacred cow: “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Hands off of my money, right?!

So, how do you like Jesus’ marketing strategy? What do you think? Was it good, or bad? It was excellent! It was perfect. It was ideal. If you don’t believe it, if you think it was bad, then, please, explain why there are billions of followers to this Jesus?

Why there is this strange organization, which is present everywhere, on every continent, in every country, for already two thousand years, and it daily keeps growing, and expanding.

This organization, which lives not for itself, but for other, which serves those whom everyone else ignores, which prays for those who persecute it, which blesses those, who curse it. The Church of our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

This organization which every Sunday, already for two thousand years, brings together sinners, outcasts, broken people, everyone who is humble enough to desire God’s gifts, to listen to what Jesus says and to be blessed by Him.

This organization, where total strangers and people from very different walks of life rejoice together in loving fellowship and call one another brothers and sisters, and this is who you are, one divine family of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

If Jesus’ campaign was bad, how to explain all of this? But if His campaign was good, then we need answer to really tricky question, – why don’t we do what Jesus did? Why do we try to ‘sell’ the Church the same way the world sells their stuff.

Why do we even try to think in categories like – what will appeal to this or that group of people? How can we give them what they want? How can we offer something that people would really like? Why do we do this?

Do we think that the Church is from this world and we need to use modern marketing strategies to get people’s attention? Let’s pretend that we are not what we are, let make us look like this world, let’s try to blend in, let’s not be offensive, and maybe we can get a few more people join us.

We have the blueprint what our disciple recruiting strategy should be. From God Himself. “Hate you family, take your cross, be ready to give up everything that you have.” This is what works. This is what created the Church universal.

By now you may think that perhaps your pastor has lost his mind. Do you know why Jesus’ campaign was so successful? It is very simple. He has given us the key. Because He did not relay of the power of persuasion, or on the power of appealing to people’s needs, but because He relied on the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is how He works. The Holy Spirit comes to people when they hear God's message proclaimed, both God's eternal and unchanging will, His demands for His human creatures, and also the Gospel, everything that God has done for us.

Do you think that Jesus was rude? Or unloving? Why did He say these harsh things? Why didn't He speak lovingly and kindly? He did. He said what He said because He loved these people. He showed His love dying for them.

But He knew that you can't be His disciples as long as there is something more important in your life than Jesus. He knew they needed to hear the truth. Only when the truth is spoken the Holy Spirit can do His work.

When God's people speak God's message, whatever strange and offensive it may seem, and by the way, it was as strange and as offensive then as it is now, then the Holy Spirit begins His hearts and lives changing work.

What is that that He does? He changes the way we see things, the way we understand the world. You see, the world sees everything that God (or His Church) demands as oppressive, restrictive, unpleasant, narrow, etc.

In their rebellious hearts they see God exactly as the serpent described Him. "This God, He just doesn't want you to be happy, He doesn't want you to be masters of your own lives, that's why He tries to rob you of your freedom and to cage you with His rules."

This is how the world sees God's commandments, this is how the world sees Jesus invitation to follow Him and all the requirements we heard today. And the world hates it, for they want to be like gods themselves.

Sadly also many who call themselves Christians think and act likewise. Hating what God demands from them, seeing it as oppressive, even as the Scriptures clearly teach: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

But when you receive the Holy Spirit, your eyes are open, you are brought from the darkness of this rebellious and broken world into the light of Jesus Christ, and God's wisdom is revealed to you.

You begin to see things with the eyes of the Holy Spirit, you begin to see things as they really are. "Hate you family, and even yourself." Sounds terrible for the world. But when the Holy Spirit enlightens you, you realize that what Jesus demands is to love Him more and trust Him more than to anyone and anything else.

Is this restrictive? Sure, we love our families. Our families give us support, security, in a way also our identity, joy and so on. But if we think that all this comes from our families, and not from God, who has graciously blessed us with our families, we are missing the big picture.

Whatever many good things we have in this life, families, friends, and so on, they all are God's gifts. He is the Giver. And He simply wants us to realize that. Why? Because He needs our gratitude? Not at all, don't flatter yourself! Who do you think we are?

No, He wants us to realize it for our own sake. Everything in this world comes and goes, everything changes. And if you put your trust in something vanishing, if you love something that will disappear, if your trust is something that is only temporary, then you will suffer.

This is why Jesus demands – trust and love me more than anything. I am in control. If I am with you, you will always have everything that you need, even if the whole world would perish.

The Holy Spirit helps us to see, that whatever God demands, He demands it for our sake. To care for us, to protect us, and, yes, to give us freedom. Freedom from being attached and rely upon something that can't deliver what we truly need.

And on the other hand, as soon as we try to trust and love dear Jesus more than anything, what does He do? He commands us to love one another, to honor our parents, to love our spouses, to care for our children, and He actually teaches how to do it the best. For He knows, He designed us, and He wants us to understand His wisdom.

What about this cross? What does this mean? In this life there are always many choices. The world around us is good with advertisement, as the serpent was. It makes things look appealing even if they are harmful and dangerous.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, if you have learned the truth and know the will of your loving Savior, you will always have to face hard choices, – to be faithful to Jesus and to do something that this world doesn't understand and doesn't value.

For example. The greatest gifts of God for us Christians are given in a very strange way. On Sunday mornings by human beings speaking in our own language, and by us partaking in a very simple meal, just a bread and wine. Not too fancy.

Why would you choose that? There are so many much, much more attractive activities to be involved in. But if the Holy Spirit opens your eyes, then you begin to see, that this is where eternity and time meet, that this is where God comes to dwell among His human creatures and to bless us.

Or think about sexual ethics. If there is such a thing left. The world presents sex as recreational activity. Promiscuity is celebrated as achievement of humanity. So many, it seems, have forgotten what marriage is, and even the Church begins to use the language of the world, partners...

One of our friends was recently invited to the dinner, and when he came alone hosts asked where his wife was. He replied that he didn't know she was invited, for the invitation was sent only for him and his partner.

What do Christians do? Many just do whatever the world does, and then they are not seen in their congregations anymore. But there are many, wonderful, courageous, beautiful Christian people who take their cross, and keep themselves chaste for their marriages. It may not be that easy, in the world that ridicules virtues and celebrates vices.

And they don't see it as oppressive restrictions from dark ages. With the eyes of the Holy Spirit they see it as a wonderful freedom, where Jesus Christ with His Spirit has enabled them to live loving their Lord, and loving their neighbor.

Do you know what is their reward? First, joy, peace and good conscience before the most important person in their lives, before Jesus. But also, when time comes, blessed marriages, pure and free from embarrassing past and broken hearts.

The same way we could go through all the commandment as see that they are the way of wisdom and the way of freedom, joy and peace. Let's just look at one more thing that Jesus said.

“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Basically this is the flipside of the same coin with hating your relatives. Except this time it targets something that has so much power over us, our possessions.

Why do possession and money has such a power over us? For to great extent they can give us the sense of independence, worth, security, they can get us what our hearts desire, and therefore people often have possessions as their true god.

Again, what Jesus demands is for our sake and for our sake only. Possessions are good, money is good, wealth is good, as long as you see them and use them as gifts of gracious and generous heavenly Father.

But if you expect from them what only God can and desires to give, you have made them into an idol, into a false god, and you will inevitably suffer. How? From missing out on relationships with true living God Jesus Christ.

Rejecting His love and care and exchanging to it dead things. Second, you will suffer from losing peace, joy and freedom, which only God can give, and which you can't experience if your future, security, worth and happiness depends on what you have.

Then your whole focus will be on keeping, protecting and multiplying your possessions, instead of freely rejoicing in them as in God's gifts and gladly sharing them with others. As we can see, whatever Jesus demands, He does it for you.

The last thing. Jesus Christ. He is the eternal God, the Son of God, the Lord of the Universe. He choose to leave heavenly Kingdom, His Father, His throne of glory, so that He could save you.

He gave up everything for you. For He loves you more than anything. In His earthly life He lived as one of us, and experience everything we experience. His own family rejected Him. He took the cross, meaning, He died on the cross. Innocent. Because of our sins, mine and yours.

He left all that He had to serve others, to serve you. There is nothing He doesn't understand about hardship that His people may face. And now, He has promised that He will be with you, whatever happens. In His Church, among His people.

And He has sent us to bring others into His Kingdom, to bring them into freedom. But, if we don't trust the power of the Word and the Spirit, then we move into the worldly business of marketing, trying to appeal to people's wants.

And then the only possible outcome is the worldly gathering of people, who have come to get their needs satisfied, but not the Church or our Risen Lord and Savior. Jesus has promised His presence, He has sent us His Spirit, this is His Church and not ours, and He expects from us one thing – to be faithful.

Let's make Him proud. Let's be ready to speak God's message with courage and winsomely, and see what the Spirit can accomplish.

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding, keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.