

SERMON FOR 23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 2025

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The Basílica de la Sagrada Família, or in English the Basilica of the Holy Family. Is a large Roman Catholic church in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. Designed by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí. It is a staggering feat of engineering and architectural design.

The construction of Sagrada Família had commenced in 1882, and Gaudí became involved in 1883, taking over the project and transforming it with his architectural and engineering style—combining Gothic and curvilinear Art Nouveau forms.

Gaudí devoted his last years to the project, and at the time of his death at age 73 in 1926, the sad reality was that less than a quarter of the project was complete.

Sagrada Família's construction progressed slowly, as it relied on private donations and was interrupted by the Spanish Civil War—only to resume intermittent progress in the 1950s. Construction passed the midpoint in 2010 with some of the project's greatest challenges remaining and an anticipated completion date of 2026 is planned which will be the centennial of Gaudí's death.

It has been said by one art critic "that is impossible to find a church building anything like it in the entire history of art." But alas, despite its cultural and artistic importance, it stands incomplete. When they started the build, they did not count the cost.

And that is precisely what we are confronted with in Today's Gospel, counting the cost. Jesus' words in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke are some of the most hard hitting and divisive on record. Not only is there the radical call to 'hate' your father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters and even life itself. There is also the demand of discipleship, a demand to pick up the cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Talk about a heavy load. How do we approach this hard-hitting verse? Well firstly in these verses Jesus is declaring an important thing. That loving God is our primary relationship. He is using 'hate' here as a way of comparing the kind of radical commitment that one should be ready to make in following Jesus. He is not saying that we abuse and push away our family members who do not subscribe to our faith, but is using hyperbole, as he often does, to entice his hearers to listen, and it sure works.

Then there is the talk of cost. Interestingly enough the word for cost here is only used once in the New Testament. It means 'what we give up to acquire, accomplish, maintain or produce something'. It therefore involves a measure of sacrifice and perhaps loss or penalty in gaining. Cost requires effort and resources.

Jesus in this passage is preparing his disciples for what lies ahead. And it is reassuring to know that they didn't get it right, some denied him, some fell about the way, but his call was always to dust themselves off and continue on the path. Because discipleship is a journey, not an overnight fix.

Jesus describes this process with an image of his own. Not to dissimilar to Gaudi's Sagrada Família, a man wanting to build a tower who does not sit down and estimate the cost, and in turn is ridiculed for not completing. Jesus is encouraging his hearers to think long and hard about their commitments.

And the key to his message is that discipleship is to be costly. He is urging us not be naïve, but rather realistic.

And as inheritors of this faith we are to be realistic people. And therefore it is our duty to share this realism with others. I am more than certain that many of you here this morning have incurred some cost in following Jesus. And I'm sure many of you know that such discipleship is not a one of decision, it is a process.

I am always rather miffed at those who give out tracts that declare 'if you say this formulaic prayer you will enter in to heaven'. A very strange way to approach the Gospel, and more importantly those who know that there is no quick fix to the Christian life.

But it's not all hardship. The paradoxical nature of God is that in fact following him is a joy, it gives one a deep assurance, and it guides us in making right decisions. And through the church, offers us deep and meaningful relationships.

At the end, this whole passage is about relationships. Jesus is declaring that love is costly; it costs the one who loves another for if love is not costly, then is it truly love? It should however not be an unbalanced burden where one is constantly giving till they are drained of life. No, love is about a radical mutuality, a sacrifice of one's own interests to invest in the interests of another.

For all our human relationships are mirrors of the divine, as Sir Walter Raleigh famously said "Divine is love, and scorneth worldly pelf, and can be bought with nothing but with self." It is the self that we offer to God and to others in sacrificial love that is at the heart of Jesus' call.

If discipleship is to cost us, it needn't just be material or financial, in fact, in that process of becoming disciples we must give up our need to acquire, our yearning for success, our petty jealousies, our denigrating stereotypes of others, our prejudices and hatreds, for as Saint Paul said, "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13)

So let us this morning, in our own way, offer ourselves to God afresh, not in one moment of emotion, but with an understanding that the journey we are on is long one. And may we through the grace of God be like Gaudi's magnificent Basilica upon its completion, a magnificent monument that glorifies God.