

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 23rd Sunday Ordinary Year C1

Okay, we need to settle something right up front: There is a 'trigger word' that can be an obstacle to understanding what Jesus is up to in today's gospel. We all heard it and I imagine we all felt the same squirm? **HATE?** Did Jesus just say **HATE**? As if there is not enough divisiveness and people turning against one another, going on in the world right now, that now we hear Jesus Himself say that we have to "Hate" to follow Him. But haven't we all, from our own mom's laps always been told **not** to hate anyone? And Jesus adds here that our family is to be on the receiving end of our hate? Surely not? Well, you are right. No, that is not what Jesus means! Up front, let's take that off the table: Jesus is not suggesting that that we harbor any malice toward our mother, father, brother, sister etc. Absolutely not, He is not saying that. So, the Big Question? What is Jesus saying, then? I suggest we remove all the emotional baggage that comes with the word 'hate', and substitute the phrase, ***"love less than"***. He is saying we need to 'love less', anything that is not God. 'Love Less mother, father, brother, sister—***love them yes, but love God more***'. Start with God, Love Him above all, and then proportionally we love outward from Him through the rest of our relationship circles. So how about hearing 'love less' instead of the word 'hate'? So, did I just change what bible said? No, but I know the minute I said that, some literalists protested, "How can you justify changing that word of Jesus on Him (He said hate!)" But let me point out how another gospel Matthew expresses this same thought of Jesus in a parallel passage. In Matthew 10:37 Jesus says, "Whoever loves father or mother ***more than me...*** is not worthy to be my disciple". Now, that is what I'm suggesting! But, even if Matthew didn't say it this way too, in handling Jesus' controversial words we are always wise to remind ourselves of who Jesus is again, before we interpret what His words mean. This is the Jesus who tells us to 'Love your enemies' (Matt 5:43). So, for goodness' sake, if we are to love those who would kill us, ***certainly we should embrace in love those who fed, raised and protect us-our parents***. And this is Jesus who summarizes all the commandments, by teaching we are to 1) Love God & 2) Love your neighbor as ***yourself*** (Mark 12:30-31). If I love neighbor as ***self***, then that 'self' includes one's own kinfolk-my own blood. Furthermore, We see Jesus Himself uphold faithfully, following the 4th commandment of 'Honor your father and mother' when he made arrangements for His mother Mary to be cared for at His dying, by the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross in John 19:26-27. Also,

Jesus once called out *(or more specifically, He condemned)* the Pharisees when He attacked their attempt to wiggle out of the responsibility to support elderly parents (Mark 7:11). So what is Jesus even doing by letting the word 'hate' cross His lips?

Getting our attention! And we sure heard him didn't we? I've spent half of this homily so far, better framing His words so we can fruitfully understand, make sense of what He said. And what is that? He wants dedicated disciples; completely focused followers! He wants all of our hearts, not half-hearted disciples. He wants servants not just when it is easy to follow, but especially when it is hard. That is the cross: loving Him past our limits. All the way. So Jesus is saying that if we put loving/following anyone else above God, then we are lost *(and I'd suggest that whoever we think we are helping, they are getting less from us than they'd get from God-they lose too)*. For example, if my mom or dad, thought that accepting my care over God's care was alright, then they come up way short too-I can't LOVE them as God does! I think that is what this all comes down to--We have to go with Jesus, and this choice will never do anyone harm. God made my mother and father/all the family, and do I think I can take care of them better than He? *If I am not loving God above all, then I am not loving anyone in the best sense possible*. I need to love them as God would. So if for God's own reason, God calls me to some worthier task even over my parent's voice, then God has something better for them than I can give them. Again, He made them- and loves them and is going to give them oh so, much more than I possibly could. He is not going to allow harm to befall them. He has them covered. But He wants my full attention.

That is why he uses the two examples of a 1) tower builder and 2) a military general. A builder is not going to start the job, until he knows he has all the materials lined up and laborers to finish the work. The same with a general. He is going to ensure he has troop-strength enough and sufficient arms/ammo before he wages the battle. In my case, I know before I climb up on a roof, I am going to make sure my coworker doesn't have ear buds in, or a tendency to walk away & nap in truck- the last thing I want is the ladder blowing over and my helper off distracted maybe on phone call with family *(if we think that doesn't happen, ask me about that some time-drama twice, who would think both on church buildings!)* I need that helper's undivided attention-while we are on the heights, no texting, no calls home, please. Or when we cook a dish, don't we first assemble all the ingredients before even starting. I had a learning experience recently, when I went grocery shopping for items for my menu of meatloaf, & side dish of hash-brown casserole,

and found everything but two things. Where is the sausage anymore? There was bacon galore, but I couldn't find sausage anywhere. But also I couldn't find frozen shredded hash-browns. What? No Potatoes? I had to go with a backup plan B menu of baked ham and broccoli casserole! I needed all the ingredients, or move onto plan B. *(On those hash-browns, it was only later that I learned after I gently complained to a friend that they said, "Didn't you know, they don't put bagged hash-brown potatoes in the upright freezers anymore- they are in the special chest freezers along the meat wall aisle! No I didn't know it-SO, they were there all along!")*

That is what Jesus is doing by lining up undivided loyalty before initiating a mission. He wants our total dedication- all of our focus and time. And if He takes care of us, we have to know that He will cover all of our concerns too. If I am on His task, then He will cover what I thought was important-even something so close to my heart as my family matters.

{In case we still feel like we may be shorting our family if we go with Jesus, keep in mind that Jesus ensured that apostles' families were taken care of. When he called James and John away from their fishing job with Father Zebedee, notice the reading said, there were fellow hired men with Zebedee (Mark 1:20). When Jesus was made aware of Simon's mother in law being ill, he went straight to her bedside healing her (Luke 4:39), and when Lazarus was sick to death, Jesus made way eventually to Mary/Martha House to raise Lazarus from dead.....(John 11:11) Or if you are familiar with Juan Diego and Our Lady Guadalupe story, as she asked him to visit Bishop, Juan wanted excuse himself because he was hurrying on way to get a priest for his dying uncle. Mary assured him, it would work out, and she herself visited the uncle, and God brought the man back to health.}

So, we are to 'Go with God' above all, and all else will fall into proper place. Again, God did make us, and love us all. He is not going to have our family be denied, if he calls us off to something. In fact, God is love (1 John 4:7-8) and as I love my father, mother, brothers sisters, *I am loving them through God* (if it is genuine already!) Could I love them more than God loves them? No. My love for anyone is nothing alongside God's love of them, so I must love God and take direction from Him on loving them properly. He made them- He gave them to me- and me to them. So, it starts with God. God must be the lens I see them through and Love of Him first, must be what directs my proper care and service given to them.