

HOMILY for 4th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

A cop pulls over a car full of nuns. The cop says, “Sister, the speed limit on this highway is 55 mph. Why are you going so slow?”

Sister replies, “I saw a lot of signs that said, 41, not 55.”

The cop says, “Sister, that’s the name of the highway, not the speed limit.”

“Silly me,” the embarrassed nun says, “Thanks for letting me know. I’ll be more careful.”

But then, the cop glances in the back seat where the other nuns are quaking with fear.

He asks, “Excuse me, Sister, what’s wrong with your friends in the backseat?”

Sister says, “Oh, we just got off Highway 101.”

Still, Jesus called those nuns to follow Him. Jesus also invites us & many more others to be His disciples. This Sunday’s Second Reading gives us the standard/conditions of discipleship as following, “Brothers & sisters, you are among those called. Consider your own situation. Not many of you are wise, as people account wisdom; not many are influential; & surely not many are well-born. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; He singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world’s lowly born & despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something; so that mankind can do no boasting before God.” Paul evidently reminded members of the early Church about their identity. They were not wise, influential, or famous. Yet, God chose them to be God’s disciples, instead of the smart, the popular, or the powerful. So, why has God chosen those people to be God’s disciples? Because God has wanted to use the weak to shame the strong, to lift up the lowly & the outcast in order to humble the powerful & the proud.

In case we have any doubt about that unusual standard of God, we can review on how God picked God’s chosen ones throughout the Bible. First, God chose the Israelites to be the people of God. But, they were not the most powerful people compared to the Philistines, the Egyptians, or the Romans. Next, God picked David who were just a young shepherd to battle a professional, well-armed giant named Goliath with only a sling shot & a few stones & defeated him to give God’s people protection. Then, Jesus called many uneducated fishermen to be His disciples instead of the well-learned & the powerful. Even now, our Lord & His mother Mary have often revealed themselves to the lowly, child-like folks as we have seen those apparitions happen in Fatima, Lourdes, or Guadalupe.

If we are still not quite sure on which side Jesus would back up & support in this world, this Sunday’s Gospel has the following message to tell us, “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are the lowly... Blessed are those persecuted for holiness’ sake....” As you can see, Jesus reached out to the lowly, the poor, & the persecuted to give them support & the promise of the entire Kingdom of God. He wanted all the underdogs to know that God is on their side & will do everything possible to give them a helping hand. But, Jesus did not stop there. He extended his loving care & generous spirit to other groups of people as He said, “...Blessed are the sorrowing... Blessed are they who show mercy... Blessed are the single-hearted... Blessed too the peacemakers...” Jesus seemed to extend His hand to the sorrowing & the single-hearted & invite them to follow Him. He also encouraged His disciples to show mercy & be the ambassadors of peace in the world. Those are the prospective candidates that the Lord would want to recruit to be His disciples.

However, the Lord does not only desire the prospective candidates with qualities such as faithfulness, mercy, & peace to be His disciples. That is why He blessed those folks in His teaching of the Beatitudes. He has also encouraged His disciples to acquire more virtues & live up to them in order to be like Him. This Sunday's First Reading tells us some of the virtues that the Lord would want His disciples to possess as following: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth... Seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger." It continues, "...But, I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble & lowly who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord: the remnant of Israel." Evidently prophet Zephaniah calls on the world to seek the Lord, especially the humble & the lowly of the earth. He also encourages more people to seek justice & humility in order to find salvation on the day of the Lord's anger, or Judgment Day. For the Lord desires a group of followers who are humble & lowly. Why is that? For these folks would want to depend on the Lord & wish to be in His presence all the time. That is why over the years we have seen the Lord choose the remnant of Israel, or David, or fishermen, or the lowly folks to be His disciples & reveal Himself only to them. He never called on the proud & the powerful to follow Him.

Why hasn't the Church looked for the prospective candidates with the qualities of faithfulness, mercy, & peace to serve the Lord? Why hasn't the Church encouraged its members to seek justice & humility? Ironically the Church nowadays would look for its prospective candidates with all sorts of interesting qualities except faithfulness & humility. In my past seminary experience, the Church seemed to desire future priests who are popular, well-spoken, & smart. In its daily life, the Church has also talked about all sorts of fund raisings & extended warm welcome to the wealthy & the powerful compared to the poor & the lowly. Lately, the Church wants to get more involved in political issues than calling its members to seek justice & virtues such as humility, faithfulness, & mercy. That is why I'm not surprised to see the Church & the world get stuck in its current mess of hate & violence. In fact, I dare to say that if the Church & the world would challenge its members to seek justice & humility, we might have more people who desire the Lord & a much different world – one that is full of peace & love. So, I encourage you to work hard for justice & humility & call on people around you to desire for those qualities & see what we might end up with.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus continues to call us & many others to be His disciples. That honor is given to us not because we possess certain qualities or deserve it somehow. Rather, He wants us to share His Good News with the world & inherit His Kingdom someday. He calls us to seek Him before anything else in this world as His disciples. To show our desire & commitment to Him, let us try to seek justice & humility above everything else in our daily life.