

In the Gospel we just heard we have two aspects of Jesus' teaching. He invites us to take up our crosses and to have hospitality for others in following Him.

The hospitality that Jesus describes is toward His apostles, His messengers. Even though we might not care for the personality or style of one of His disciples, still the messenger deserves respect because of whom he represents.

Jesus' words about our carrying the cross are very difficult and distressing. We do remember that the Lord said that He came to put fire into families; he came for division, to separate mother and daughter, father and son. Here, Jesus says, that if we love our relatives more than we love Him, we are not worthy of Him. We cannot claim that we are his followers or disciples.

These words of Jesus remind us what happened in the early Church when the decision to become Christian tore families apart because Christianity was so incompatible with everything around it. When people became Christian, they separated themselves from a whole network of social and business contacts. Becoming a Christian was a major decision. It was not just a private choice. It had serious consequences. Many people were persecuted because of becoming Christians.

Today, so much around us is hostile to Gospel teaching: the assault on human life and dignity. On almost every front, we are faced with the decision to silently go along with everyone else or to live as Christ teaches. It is a choice as serious for us as for the early Christians.

There are people who, as St. Paul says in the second reading, were baptized into Jesus Christ. On the day of their Baptism, they were given a white garment, anointed with holy oil, given the lighted candle. But things went wrong.

Is there still room for them here? This is the link with the hospitality of the Shunamite woman in today's first reading from the Old Testament.

We all know fellow-Catholics who have made mistakes and committed serious sin of all kinds who now feel that the Catholic Church doesn't want them anymore. That is not true. We gather here to become holy. We all are working on it and it is not easy without hospitality which implies charity. The hospitality of the Church is not the hospitality of a hotel where perfect manners are expected. Here, in the Church, we have the hospitality of grace, where people who made mistakes big ones and bad ones can come to begin again.

The Church does not welcome only the good men or good women or the "saints" ones. We know that Jesus came especially for the sinners that we are. There is room for them here. It would be nonsense if the community Jesus founded is the only one to throw its wounded overboard. The hospitality of grace is about helping people put the pieces back together. That is why weekly Mass is important for all of us.

We all have crosses to carry and they are different forms but help us to follow Jesus once we took them as God's will. Here is the place where we can come to renew our vision, revive our commitment to Christ, relight our baptismal candle, clean off our baptismal garment, restore our baptismal dignity, reclaim our place at the Lord's table, and slowly remodel our lives.

If we know Catholics or former Catholics who feel that they are no longer welcome or who have been overwhelmed by their cross in life, let us try to show them the hospitality of grace. Let them know that there is a place for them here.

The Church is a place they can call home, where they can renew their spiritual strength, remove the stains from their baptismal garment, and relight their baptismal candles. We can make the effort to show them the magnificent hospitality of Jesus Christ.