

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14: 25

“If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a million times, cut it out!” What parent hasn’t said that or words to that effect on many occasions. Yes, of course we know it is an exaggeration. The point is that the words have been said before and many times before and there is frustration because the words have not been heeded by the ones to whom they were addressed, in this case the children. And the parents want their words to be heard and heeded and obeyed. Just as their own parents wanted their words to be heard, heeded and obeyed when they were the young parents. It is a figure of speech. It is sometimes called exaggeration; at other times it is referred to as hyperbole.

That is a wonderful Greek word (Hyper--over or above, and Bolo—I throw: I throw something way over there). Hyperbole is an exaggeration that is made in order to stress, to emphasize or to make an impact. Hyperbole is most effective when it is used rather sparingly. Hyperbole is recognized as not to be taken literally but as an overstatement that seeks to be heard. We happen to have a President at this time in the history of our country who uses and overuses hyperbole all the time. Usually Presidents don’t overuse such figures of speech but President Trump loves to use hyperbole. He loves to exaggerate and go over the top in his figures of speech. Those who tend to be literalists who take people at their word usually find it very difficult to deal with those who overuse hyperbole.

But even the Lord Jesus used hyperbole from time to time. Jesus was very aware of the Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother. And yet he speaks here of his followers as those who have to hate their fathers and mothers. Not literally, of course. But Jesus is stating the importance of establishing priorities. He must be the first of our priorities. The others will fall into place after him. But he exaggerates in order to make his point. We often do the same. The important thing is to realize not the exaggeration but the meaning that is truly meant. For that we have to learn how to really listen.