

NOT WORTHY OF ME?

(These are tumultuous words from the mouth of Our Lord.
They sound strange. Almost selfish. Why does he speak them?)

“Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” Jesus of Nazareth said that. Jesus of Nazareth also said: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” It doesn’t sound like the same Jesus. Why does he say this in the gospel passage from Matthew today?

Jesus speaks in an outlandish way. It sounds like something an egotist would say. “Hey, look at me. Who really is the important one here, people. All eyes on ME.” I don’t believe any of the Old Testament prophets spoke like this. I don’t believe the prophet Mohammed spoke like that. There is nothing like those words from the Buddha. The gods and goddesses of Hinduism make no such statements. So why does this Jesus of Nazareth say what he says. Doesn’t he know how it is going to sound to people’s ears? How off-putting it will be? Is Jesus kind of tone deaf here?

What happened to the selfless Jesus who is meek and humble of heart? Suddenly there is this demanding Jesus who wants to be first in everybody’s life. What is that all about? When you first heard that, how did you hear it? Did you just kind of dismiss it? Jesus must be having a bad day, sort of thing?

Why would Jesus say such a thing? Isn’t it way over the top? Yes. Of course it is. Then what do you think his reason was for saying this? Didn’t he understand how people would hear these kind of words? Again, of course he did. Who dares to speak like that? Only one. Only the One, True God dares to speak like that, dares to speak the unpopular truth simply because it is true and simply because it needs to be said. Only the Incarnate Word of God can dare to speak like that.

But again, why does he speak those words? Because we need them. Jesus brings something that we need and cannot really live without. We do not always realize this. He comes to give us this gift so necessary to our being successful in this life. The gift is the Holy Spirit. First bestowed upon us in baptism. Then bestowed in more mature form later on in our lives at confirmation. The Holy Spirit is the empowering Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the truly humanizing spirit. The Holy Spirit is the truly divinizing spirit.

Without this Spirit within us and working with us, we can desire things and want to accomplish things and decide to live a certain way—BUT—we will fail. We will

not be able to. It is hard enough to do these things even after we have received the Holy Spirit. It is impossible without the Holy Spirit. It is not impossible to desire or want certain things. Not impossible to yearn to be our best selves. It's just impossible to accomplish. My friends, we cannot do this thing called life on our own or by means of our own power. Although that is often precisely what we want and how we proceed. Jesus understands us, understands what sin has done to us. Understands what is the one thing that is the condition for the possibility of our ever becoming fully human and then fully divine. Only he can remedy our plight.

That is why Jesus came. And that is what he came to do. To share his own power with us. And that is why he says so clearly: Put me first in your life and all the rest will fall into place. Yes. That's the truth of it. Mom and dad and the kids will always be there. Put Jesus first and the rest will fall into place. We ask: How can we tell. His response? Trust me. Look at that crucifix. View the empty grave. Listen to the words of those who saw me after I died. Dare to believe. Dare to follow my way. Take the risk. Yes. Let's take the risk. Let's go to communion.