



Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, "If any one 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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, 'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.' Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

Introductory Prayer: Lord God, I believe that you are present here for this moment of prayer. Even if I have not really longed for this time together, I know that you have been waiting for me. As an expression of my gratitude and love, I truly wish to give myself totally to you during this meditation.

Petition: Lord, help me to realize that holiness is worth the effort!

1. A Capital Campaign for Holiness: Our Lord remarks on the need to calculate the costs and estimate the amount of resources needed in a building project. That sounds like a "feasibility study," the first step of any capital campaign. Whether a parish is trying to build a new hall, or a school is trying to put up a new building, there's no way to avoid a great deal of work in order to make the endeavor successful. The Lord is saying something similar about our spiritual lives. We have to know what it will take to achieve the goal. His answer to this question? Much sacrifice. This can sound daunting. But just like the thrill of cutting the ribbon when the building is all paid for and ready to be used, the effort to grow in holiness will result in a magnificent eternity!

2. A Battle Plan's First Goal? The answer is simple: Don't get beat! This second image of our Lord makes another important point about discipleship. War is tough, and if getting beat is a likely prospect, you'd better find other tactics to achieve the goal. So too with our discipleship. In our efforts to grow holy, some "battles" will be won easily; others will need to be avoided completely. So, let's not get beat by foolishly overestimating our capacities. This happens especially when we don't avoid the occasions of sin, thinking ourselves strong enough to handle them. At times, the best battle strategy is not to fight, but to flee!

3. What Place for Our Relationships? In all this reflection about plans and resources, the Lord has some extremely radical words about our relationships. In the hyperbole of "hating father and mother" a very important teaching emerges: As vital as these relationships are, they cannot take the first place in our heart. That place belongs to the source of our entire existence, the one who loves us with a tender and passionate love — God himself. This is why the Cross is so important. When we see how thoroughly Jesus embraces the will of God above everything and everyone, he gives us a pattern to follow. But the divine irony is that by following Christ in the way of the cross, this "hatred" actually results in a greater and more self-sacrificing love in those very relationships that have to take a back seat to the Lord.

Conversation with Christ: Oh Jesus, following you is not easy. You ask me to put everything in second place to you and pick up my cross every day. I won't be able to do this without your grace. I am weak and frail, but I believe that you will give me the strength I need.

Resolution: I will take some time and think about my priorities to make sure that God is always coming first.