

## Thirteenth Sunday Ordinary Time (A)

I still have very vivid memories of when I was in grade school, of saying the Pledge of Allegiance before we started our first class of the day. The American flag was displayed near the front door of the classroom, we would all stand, put our hand over our heart and say the pledge. Many of you may have done the same. I am not sure if they still do it today.

Our allegiance was to the country, not to any one person. Perhaps at a young age I didn't really grasp what this all meant, what the cost would be to me for that allegiance, but I had a sense that this was the best country in the world to live in, there was freedom here, and we were loyal to our country.

Jesus too speaks of allegiance in today's gospel. When Jesus speaks about allegiance or loyalty, it is not a loyalty to a country, it is loyalty to Him. He makes it very clear when speaking with the apostles:

1. Your loyalty will lie with me and me alone.
2. Your devotion, your allegiance to me will come before everything else, your family, friends, even yourself. If you cling to your life, put your life first, ahead of me you will lose it, but if you lose it for me you will find it.

We shouldn't be surprised at this. We have heard it before. When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment he does not hesitate to respond, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind."

One simple example comes to mind for me when I thought of what the Lord is saying here.

I remember growing up, my mom and dad liked to go camping on the weekends. They would find a nice campground by a lake and we would leave on a Friday. But before we got to the campsite my dad would find the closest town and then look for the Catholic church. (This of course was long before the internet.) He would then drive to the church and look at the sign outside of it to get the Mass times. Then it was off to the camp ground. No matter what we were doing, how much fun we were having, how good the fish were biting, when Sunday came it was all put on hold and we went to Mass. It was Jesus first, always first with us. This simple act had a profound affect on my life. I even spoke about it at my dad's funeral. My mom and dad brought me to Christ but it was things like this that anchored me in Christ and put me in a position I believe to allow God's love and mercy to bring me to eternal life.

Here is another viewpoint on what this might look like, perhaps a more challenging one for us. In a commentary it was put this way: "because Jesus reveals the present redemptive rule of God and is therefore the criterion for future judgement, no other person or relationship can be as significant as the relationship to Jesus. Allegiance to Jesus must manifest itself in public confession, in the refusal to be cowed or silenced by fear."

What might this look like or where might we encounter this. I believe Jesus gives us a clue here as well. It can be hard to stand up for Christ and the Church in public settings, but it will be even harder in our own families. Sin will always be a hot button item, Church teaching will be challenged, the sacraments will not be understood, Sunday Mass obligations will be dismissed, marriage and how it looks today as compared to what the Church teaches can be two different things, confession and or people feeling they don't need it. Or perhaps even the Eucharist, the summit of the Catholic Church. Many are unchurched on the significance of it or of the gift it really is. When I was on a retreat in January I heard a priest talking about this. He said that for 1550 years there was one definition of the Eucharist. Simply, it is the body and blood of Christ. 1550 years. Then came the protestant reformation. Within 50 years of that event, by the year

1600 there were 149 definitions of the Eucharist. The Catholic Church still has one, it is that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ.

And so you can see the importance of Jesus's message. Many have lost their way, if they believe in God they have relegated him to the back seat of their lives. Many will seek lasting happiness where it doesn't exist or put their very salvation in jeopardy. As followers of Christ, we were given a mission, to bring the truth of Jesus Christ and his Church to the world. We are not to remain silent, or compromise the truth of his message, even if there will be division with the ones we love. There will be difficulties, but we will overcome them with his help. We will not be left alone. We must make Christ the very fabric of our lives. We are, whether we want to be or not in the business of saving souls.