

Homily – Lk. 14: 25-33

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

4th September 2022

Eric Liddell was a Scottish Olympic Gold Medalist runner, a rugby union international player and a great Christian missionary. He came from a religious tradition that took seriously the commandment to keep ‘holy’ the Sabbath day.

Liddell became well known for being the fastest runner in Scotland while at college. And the Newspapers carried stories of his track feats, and many articles declared his potential as an Olympic winner. As a member of the British Olympic Team, Liddell participated in the 1924 Olympics held in Paris. But he refused to run in the heats for his favourite event which was the 100 metres’ sprint, because the heats were to be held on a Sunday. But, interestingly enough, Liddell went on to win bronze and gold medals in the 200 and 400 metres events respectively, setting a world record for the 400 metres. And in 1925, at the peak of his athletic career, Liddell chose to join the London Missionary Society and went to serve in Northern China.

Now, the 1981 movie, ‘Chariots of Fire’, told his story. And there is a memorable scene in the movie when Liddell is summoned to a meeting attended by the Duke of Sutherland – President of the British Olympic committee, Lord Cadogan – who is the chairperson of that committee, and Lord

Birkenhead, a member of the committee. And the Prince of Wales is also present.

Now, the Duke explains why they've invited him to that meeting. And that was to see 'if there's any way, they could help resolve the situation'. But Liddell is adamant. He says: "I'm afraid there're no ways Sir. I won't run on the Sabbath and that's final". And Cadogan interjects: "Don't be impertinent Liddell". But then Liddell respectfully responds: "The impertinence Sir lies with those who seek to influence a man to deny his beliefs". And finally, the Prince of Wales tries to appeal to his sense of loyalty. "Mr. Liddell, he says, you're a child of your race as I am. We share a common heritage, a common bond, a common loyalty. There're times when we're asked to make sacrifices in the name of that loyalty. Without them our allegiance is worthless. As I see it, for you, this is such a time".

Standing at the Crossroads, Liddell will not be deterred from taking the path he knows to be right. And he says: "Sir, God knows I love my country, but I can't make that sacrifice". Liddell remains faithful to his principles and he doesn't race. However, he does run in the four hundred metres, setting a world record and winning the gold medal.

Well! The readings of today challenge each of us to that true Christian discipleship of total commitment to the will of God, putting God first in our lives. And in today's Gospel, Jesus lays out a few conditions for true Christian discipleship. And

they are: a) renouncing the attachment to family by putting God first; b) severing the attachment to possessions by leading a detached life; and c) to be conscious of the cost involved in following the Lord.

And what is the cost of discipleship? It is this, Jesus says: “If anyone comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple”. So, Jesus is clearly saying, that nothing should ever come before him. In short, there is no room for compromise when it comes to authentic Christian discipleship.

Well! Perhaps you and I need to ask ourselves, ‘what price have I paid lately? What has been the cost of my discipleship in the last few weeks, months or years?’ May be, the cost was giving up a relationship that was leading us in the wrong direction...or may be, the price we paid was to pay more attention to family than to a job, or may be, the price that we paid was giving up of our precious time to be with someone, to talk with someone, to be a friend or a companion to another. Or perhaps, the price that we paid was just simply standing up for our Christian principles in a society that is highly secular.

Alan Paton was a South African author and an anti-apartheid activist. Now, he tells the story about something that happened during the time of apartheid.

There was a headmaster by the name Robert Mansfield. And he headed up an old white school. And Mansfield began to bring his Athletic teams to play against all South African schools. But eventually the department of education told him that he had to stop, that it wasn't allowed. As he in no way could accept this, Mansfield resigned. A few months later, he was visited by Emmanuel Nineh - a leader in the South African community. And he came to Mansfield and said: I just wanted to meet a man who stood on his principles and left the job that was preventing him from having his students playing with other children. And, Nineh went on to say: "be careful, you are a knight in shining armour, and you can expect to be wounded". And then Nineh continued: "Well! I think I'm going to join you". Mansfield now gently looked at Nineh and said: "So you're going to be a knight in shining armour. You too might get wounded". And Nineh now very serenely but firmly replied: "The wounds don't bother me. What really frightens me is this: if I got to heaven and St. Peter looked at me and said: "where are your wounds? Was there nothing in your life that wasn't worth fighting for?"

Well, that would be the cost of discipleship Jesus is demanding of us. And you and I can expect to be wounded if we're living the life that we should.

Let us then dear friends ask the Lord to grant us the grace to be His true disciples. And I conclude with the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "If we have our Lord amidst us,

with daily Mass and Holy Communion, I fear nothing, I fear no one; He will look after me. But without Him I cannot be. I am helpless”. God bless you all, **Amen.**