

## What do you Follow?

*Note: This homily is based on Luke 9:51–62. Please read that passage to the congregation before preaching this homily.*

What do you Follow? Do you have a particular sport team?

Do you follow many friends on FaceBook? Of course you follow family - are there other particular people, or groups you follow?

Or perhaps you prefer music, bands, games, TV or Netflix programs, like Game of Thrones.

All like to follow. And there are different degrees of follower: fanatic, social, occasional.

Jesus calls us to follow him. Today in Luke 9 we see that **Nothing is More Important than Following Jesus.**

In vs 51 we read:

*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

The opening words of our passage today call us to look back to the previous events of this chapter. Our attention is focused on a momentous event - the time when Jesus will be received into heaven; the time when he will die. Earlier in this chapter Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Christ: God's Chosen King of the World. Now that his disciples recognise who he is, Jesus reveals God's plan to save his people:

## **What do you Follow?**

*Luke 9:22 And Jesus said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

Then in response to this reality, Jesus called people to follow him.

*23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"*

In the light of the staggering announcement of his approaching rejection, death and resurrection, disciples are called to:

**1. Follow Jesus to Jerusalem.** Jesus himself knows what awaits him there, yet he resolutely sets his face to go to Jerusalem. Like the Tour de France cyclist expending all his determined energy to win; like a child who can't wait to open the present - and paper going everywhere. Like someone who will do whatever it takes to be at their best friend's special event - a graduation, a baby shower, an anniversary. With that determination, Jesus sets his face for Jerusalem - knowing that death awaits him there.

As he travels, he sends messengers ahead to let the villages along the way know that he is coming. So when Jesus and the crowd following enter a Samaritan village, they already knew he was on the way. Yet they reject him because they perceive that he will not be staying. He is on his way to Jerusalem. Their rejection of him shows they do not understand or know him. In fact, they do not even want to make the effort.

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In response, Jesus' disciples suggest they pray, asking God to immediately judge and condemn these people for rejecting Jesus. But Jesus calls for peace, rebuking his own disciples. This is not the time for judgement - that will come later. Now is the time to call followers and to head for Jerusalem. And death.

As God's King, Jesus calls on all people to:

**2. Follow Jesus.** But what should followers expect? In vs. 57-62 Luke shows us 3 would-be followers of Jesus and he shows us what is required from a follower, and what a follower of Jesus can expect. The first follower shows us that being a follower is:

More than Personal Need. In vs. 57-58 Jesus is approached by a man who offers to become a follower.

*57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

Jesus' response is not a rejection, but being a follower will not mean he will have all his needs met. As a follower of Jesus he needs to be aware that:

*58 "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

Being a follower does not entitle me to having all my needs met by Jesus. Rather as a follower, I will aim to adopt the example of Jesus.

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Second, in vs. 59-60 Jesus teaches that being a follower of Jesus comes:

Above the Commitments to Family. In vs. 59 Jesus calls a man to follow him. The man agrees, but has a request: *But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* His request sounds genuine - but wait a moment - the man is already among the crowd following Jesus. He's **not on his way home**. So, has his father already died, or is he really aiming to delay following Jesus until it's convenient for him? Jesus' response to the man's request sounds harsh, but is Jesus aiming to call him out? Listen to Jesus reply:

*Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

While his own father may not have died just now, the man at least feels the pull of family and wants to follow Jesus when it suits him. Jesus' response makes it clear that following Jesus must come above the call of family. Like all followers, this man is called to proclaim the Kingdom of God. To introduce people to Jesus, their King.

The third would-be follower needs to know that:

Followers of Jesus cannot look back. You cannot be a follower and regret what you've left behind. In vs. 61-62 Jesus is approached by one who offers to follow, but even his offer includes a "but not yet" escape clause. Listen to what he says in vs. 61:

*Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."*

Jesus' response identifies the hindrance in this man's life which holds him back from being a follower:

*vs 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

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This man affirmed that he wants to follow Jesus. He is already in the crowd following Jesus. But at this crucial time in journeying to Jerusalem, he looks back at what he had already left. Jesus is saying, you can't be a follower and keep wondering about what you could have been doing. You can't be a follower and long for the life you left. The issue here is to make a clear, conscious commitment to follow Jesus. Him above all else. Of course family are important and Jesus calls on followers to honour their family. But because of who Jesus is, our family ties come second to our commitment to Jesus.

These interactions of the Samaritans, and 3 would-be followers of Jesus help us see that **nothing is more important than following Jesus**. They reveal attitudes which produce fake followers and so they alert us to reflect on our own commitment of following Jesus. If you have felt the conviction of God's Spirit this morning, then don't let that slip away. Reflect on what needs to change in your own commitment to Jesus and pray, asking him to help you grow as a genuine follower.