

## The cost of discipleship

When we are confronted with the particularly challenging elements of Jesus' teaching, there is a temptation to water them down and make them more palatable. So we might ask: Is it really necessary to "hate" even those who are closest to us to be faithful disciples? We might also ask: How does this square with the fundamental teaching of the Gospel, the call to unconditional love?

Clearly Jesus' teaching is uncompromising. The only way to understand it is to realise that the call to discipleship. Just like the call to love, the call to follow Jesus is unconditional. The stakes are too high for it to be otherwise. Jesus has come to redeem a broken world and restore us to his life of love. Anything which hinders that mission has to be resisted. He insists that nothing and no one must come between us and our following of him.

It is worth noting that even in Jesus' own family, we get a glimpse of the tension that can arise. At the age of twelve he had stayed behind in Jerusalem, thinking it was time to attend to his Father's business. This caused real distress to Mary and Joseph. It was a painful misunderstanding; in the event, Jesus returned with them to Nazareth and did not begin his public ministry for many years.

There are other occasions when Jesus clearly puts his work before his family. Mark's Gospel even describes the anxiety of the family for Jesus to the point where they were convinced he was out of his mind.

In fact, at the end, we see unconditional discipleship being lived out by Mary as she stands at the foot of the cross. She is unable to change the course of history, but she is alongside her son, bearing with him the agony of the cross, and, in that sense, she is carrying it with him. This is what we too are called to do: to bear the pain and brokenness of our world with Christ, and continue to channel his love to all those who are ready to receive it. In this way we continue to heal the pain of division, whether in our own families or across the world, and thus turn hatred into love.

We can never reason out the mystery of all this by ourselves. The book of Wisdom foresaw this, reminding us that "it is hard enough... to work out what is on earth", let alone "discover what is in the heavens" But then follows this beautiful sentence, addressed to God: "As for your intention, who could have learnt it, had you not granted Wisdom and sent your holy spirit from above?" God's Wisdom became incarnate in Jesus; and he was always encouraging his listeners to take note of what was going on around them. He advised them to make sensible plans before setting off on any venture. It is that same wisdom which we need, firstly to understand what the Lord is saying to us, and then to be able to live it.

Tim Buckley CSsR  
© Redemptorists 2010