

2019 23rd SUNDAY

A young woman named Sally Robbins was a member of the Australian Women's Rowing Eight at the Athens Olympics in 2004.

In the Final, about 300 metres from the finishing line, Sally, totally exhausted and fearing for her life if she continued, stopped rowing. The Aussie Press and talkback radio went ballistic. She was labelled "Lay-Down Sally". The most damning of all putdowns levelled at Sally was the accusation that she was 'Un-Australian'.

That being the case, Australians should have no difficulty in understanding today's Gospel. Because what Jesus is saying is that if we want to be one of His Disciples, it could cost us everything.

Discipleship is a call for total self-giving.

It means that Jesus has become the centre of our lives and everything else has to be secondary; even our spouses, our parents or our children. To 'hate' our families in the context of today's Gospel does not mean to wish evil upon them. It means that we put our desire to make them happy, secondary to our duty of following Christ.

If we are a disciple of Jesus Christ we will uphold the Gospel of Jesus Christ even if doing so brings alienation from those who are dearest to us. It means that we are prepared to give up even the good things of life if we believe that to do so will help bring about Christ's Kingdom.

Tomorrow we will celebrate Fr. Jack's 80th Birthday. For all of his life Fr. Jack has been celibate. Fr. Jack is a normal healthy man and I'm sure would never have chosen to have been celibate without believing that He was called by Jesus to make this sacrifice. Celibacy was a public statement Fr. Jack made whereby he promised to forgo something which would have given him great happiness so as to be utterly available for mission in Christ's vineyard.

In the Gospel Jesus gives us notice that before rushing headlong into making such a radical commitment within discipleship, we must first ponder on whether or not we have what it takes to make such a commitment. Fr. Jack spent six years in prayer and reflection before saying his 'Yes' to priesthood. Priesthood is not something you lightly leap into.

Three months before I was ordained I remember for the first time in my life having genuine self-doubts. On one hand I yearned for the love of a woman and the joy of being a Dad. On the other I knew myself to be called to the priesthood. Did I have the strength of will and the moral fibre to put aside

thoughts of a family and to be a priest? Today's Gospel rang through my head: "Don't follow Me unless you have counted the cost and are prepared to pay it."

I didn't trust myself. On an afternoon I will always treasure, I was standing beside a pond in the seminary gardens- alone- when I heard the words- as clear as a bell- "Trust Me." I knew it was Jesus speaking to me in my conflicted state. And I did. I trusted Jesus to help me. And I am so glad I did.

To take up Christ's Cross and to follow Him is something we are all called upon to do in one way or another. It means making sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom.

In our Parish we have hundreds of people working for the Lord in so many ways. Taking up Christ's Cross could mean you become a sacristan, give up some free time to polish the brass in the Church, arrange flowers, tend the gardens, count money or clean altar linen. It could mean singing in one of our Music Groups or serving on a Parish Committee like the Parish Leadership team or the Parish Finance Team or the School Boards of Trustees. It could mean joining the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Legion of Mary, and the Catholic Women's League, taking Children's Liturgy or attending Scripture Groups. It could mean taking Communion to the sick or elderly. Such commitments involve sacrifice. They are over and above the daily Crosses that come from living out the Gospel in the world. They are the Crosses Christ calls on us to accept if we are to be true disciples.

They all call for generosity. They all call on us to let-go of self-centeredness.

I love the following story:

A tribe in Africa has an ingenious way of trapping wild monkeys. They hollow out pumpkins and then cut a little slit in their shells just big enough for monkeys to slip their hands through. They then fill the pumpkins with peanuts, secure them to some trees and leave. The smell of the peanuts attracts the monkeys. They squeeze their hands through the slits in the pumpkins and grab the peanuts. But the opening is not big enough for the monkeys to pull out their clenched fists. Because the monkeys refuse to open their fists to give up the peanuts, they end up being enslaved in zoos for the rest of their lives.

It can be the same with us. We can become so obsessed by holding on grimly to the things in life which give us pleasure that we lose sight of what we as Christians are called to do: bring about God's Kingdom.

These are difficult days to be a disciple. Many people look on us with incomprehension. Why don't we simply toss it all in and seek a less demanding way of living.

But it has been the experience of millions that by striving to live authentically as disciples of Christ, we achieve integrated and liberated personalities.

Jesus knows that the path of discipleship it is not easy for us. And so He lavishes graces on those who strive to sincerely follow Him.

The happiest people in the world are those who are committed to full-blooded discipleship. And in this we have a rich example in dear Father Jack.