**4TH SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON**

In last Sunday Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that he was sending them in mission, like sheep among wolves----- a mission that included public ridicule and opposition, sacrifice and suffering.

That is why, in the Gospel today which continues last Sunday’s, Jesus says that a decision has to be made; a choice has to be made.  That is why Jesus says:  "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword..."  This is to contrast peace (unity and concord) and sword (conflict and division).  This is to present opposites in order to underline the great need of making a clear choice.   What are the choices?

The first is the choice between **Family and Christ.** 7Whoever loves **father or mother, son or daughter** more than me is not worthy of me.  Does this mean that a disciple should not or cannot love his family? No, it just says that although a disciple can and should his love his family, he should love Jesus first.

Do you remember that story in the Gospel of John, where Peter denied Jesus three times?  Then after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and He asked Peter three times, “Do you love me *more than these?”* That is to say:  Do you love me more than your fishing boat, your fishing nets, your friends, your family, and all that other stuff there on the seashore?  This is the same issue in Matthew 10 that Jesus wants to know: “Do you love me more than **father or mother, son or daughter**?  This is a question of priority. Love the Lord Jesus first.

The second choice to be made is between **carrying or non-carrying of the cross.**  38Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.  Jesus.  In the gospels, Jesus talked about the cross not only as a way of following Him but as a way of life*.* After the resurrection, the cross became the symbol of the love of God and his compassion. The cross symbolized God’s love that enabled a person who loved to be willing to die for another.   The second choice of carrying the cross signifies a radical commitment.

The third choice is between **life and death.** 39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.  This means losing one’s life is parallel to denying oneself.  By that, Jesus is saying that a disciple is to die to selfishness. He is to surrender his selfishness to Jesus Christ. The third choice is between serving one’s selfish ends, or serving God and other people – a choice between selfishness and selflessness.

**THE PROMISE:** One of the amazing and wonderful things about ANSWERING THE CALL of Jesus to do mission, is this: to be a missionary is not sad or tragic or desperate.  It is full of promise: 40“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ……42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

There is a profound promise here.  When a missionary surrenders his life to Christ he does not lose it.  Instead he gains a reward.  St Paul in the 1 Cor 2:9, quoting Isaiah says:  *“As it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who follow/love him.’*

**Implication and Application**:  What is the relevance of these teachings to our situation today?

Firstly, let us realize that today we are sent in mission to a world scourged by the coronavirus pandemic with all the sufferings and deaths, anxieties, unemployment, hunger, etc.  We are sent to a world in the throes of racial unrests, sometimes violent but almost always challenging to our way of relating to one another regardless of race or ethnic origin.

Secondly, in this situation, we are often called to make difficult choices, as individuals, as families, as communities. When we do, let us remember the reasons or bases **the CHOICE we make --- Jesus’ teachings this Sunday:**

1. *7Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*  We recalled Jesus asking Peter: DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?  The Love of the lord is the priority basis of the choice we will make.
2. *38Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*  The cross, the carrying of this cross – the symbol of the Lord’s radical love and compassion is the second basis of the choice we will make.
3. *39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it*.  Selflessness not selfishness is the third basis of our
4. The fourth and final basis of our choice is this promise:*42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

Yes, we are going to be blessed by the Lord because of our sincere and faithful choice and commitment.