

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
June 9, 2024

We're now three weeks into ordinary time. That said, our last three weeks have been anything but "ordinary." Three weeks ago, Pentecost... Two weeks ago, the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity... And last week, Corpus Christi, the great feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus... There was nothing "ordinary" at all about these three great celebrations.

But we're finally wearing green again. We can think of this, perhaps, as ordinary time "proper." And ordinary time, of course, is when we hear the great stories about Jesus, who he was and what he hoped to accomplish. And along the way, we'll hear Jesus talk in a particular way about discipleship, the relationship into which he invited those who would – in time – carry on his work in the world.

Given this, it's a good point in the liturgical year for us to pause and take stock. Indeed, how do we stack up as disciples of Jesus? And what precisely might Jesus have to say to us at this point in each of our own unique journeys?

So, consider four stages in the journey of discipleship. And as you do so, listen to what Jesus might be saying to you today, yes, this very day.

Pope Francis has a name for the first stage. He calls it "encounter." In the encounter stage, our relationship with Jesus may be nonexistent, broken, or tentative, perhaps. For those who are standing outside the doors of our churches, it could reflect the mistaken belief that they've outgrown a need for Jesus. And for those who may still be attending Mass, it could reflect a *pro forma* or nominal kind of faith. Yes, they're still going through the motions, perhaps, because that's what's expected of them by their parents, perhaps, or for the sake of the kids. But their hearts aren't into it. Not really. If you find yourself in this first stage of discipleship, you're not alone. By some estimates, some 80 percent of Christians fall into this category.

So what does Jesus have to say to you if you see yourself – or perhaps a loved one, a brother, a sister, a son, a daughter, or a grandchild – in this initial stage of discipleship, this initial

stage of “encounter”? “Come and see.” Yes, “come and see,” the words found in chapter 1 of John’s Gospel when Jesus turned around and saw that Andrew and John had been following him. For those who have yet to enter into a true relationship with Jesus, “come and see.” For those who are estranged from the Church for this or that reason, “come and see.” And for those among us who may be going through the motions, “come and see.” “Come and see” that there’s so much more to a relationship with Jesus than we can possibly imagine.

Pope Francis calls the second stage in the journey “accompaniment.” In this stage, there’s a desire to go deeper, a desire to learn more. It’s the “honeymoon” phase, if you will. And it’s often “accompanied” by the development of some semblance of a prayer life and the study of scripture.

So what does Jesus have to say to you if you’ve located yourself – or perhaps a loved one – in this second stage of discipleship? “Follow me.” Yes, “follow me,” the words that induced Matthew to drop everything in order to take up the life of a disciple. Matthew’s response to Jesus’ invitation changed everything in his case, as it can for you and me and for our loved ones, too, if we – like Matthew – but say “yes” to Jesus: “Yes, I will follow you wherever you may lead me.”

The third stage? Pope Francis calls the third stage of discipleship “community” or “belonging.” It’s often accompanied by a renewed love of the Mass and the Sacraments, Eucharistic Adoration, and daily prayer. It’s reflected, too, in an effort to grow in the virtues and to live intentionally in keeping with Jesus’ teachings.

So what might Jesus have to say to you if you recognize yourself – or perhaps a loved one – in this third stage of discipleship, again, the stage of “community” or “belonging”? “Remain in me.” Yes, “remain in me,” the words we find in John’s account of the Last Supper. “The going may get tough,” Jesus tells his disciples. “There will be challenges and disappointments, scandals even, just as there have always been, but remain in me, nonetheless.”

And so the final stage in the disciple's journey, which Pope Francis calls "mission..." To this point, the disciple has journeyed quite far, in fact. But for the most part, it's been an interior journey. Now there's work to be done. The true disciple who is living intentionally and consistently in this final stage of discipleship makes every effort to integrate his or her heart with his or her work in the world. There's an integrity about this way of living that makes all the difference. In the "mission" stage, the disciple serves as a true witness to Jesus' ongoing presence in the world.

And what might Jesus have to say to those who recognize themselves in this fourth and final stage of discipleship, the "mission" stage? "Go and make disciples." Yes, "go and make disciples," Jesus' final words to his friends before he ascended into heaven. "Go and make disciples by what you say and do in the world."

And so our check-in, our self-evaluation, if you will, of our personal progress – or lack thereof – as disciples of Jesus... Four stages: encounter, accompaniment, community or belonging, and mission... We'll hear more about these stages as we proceed through the stories of Jesus over the many weeks of ordinary time.

Again, however, we began with a question: "What is Jesus saying to you today?" "Come and see"? "Follow me"? "Remain in me"? Or, perhaps, "Go and make disciples"?

And how should we respond? How should we respond to Jesus? He'll be here in a few moments, you know. How should we respond to him when we encounter him in his true presence, yes, in his very person, in his body and blood? How should we respond when we hear his voice?"

In fact, there is nothing ambiguous at all about Jesus' invitation to each of us. He cuts right to the chase. "Come and see." "Follow me." "Remain in me." And, yes, "go and make disciples."