

Fr. Rudy's Reflections

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 3, 2023

The Paradox of Discipleship

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

From a young age, many of us have been on a path to attain our personal goals in life, and thus, live by a set of principles that, we believe, can shape and enhance our prospects. For example, we are drawn toward seeking a good education, establishing beneficial relationships or adopting a strong work ethic so that our objectives might be more easily realized. Whether it is wealth, power, influence, or other personal gratifications we pursue, it seems we strive, ultimately, for pleasure, peace, happiness, and, in an ironic sense, the fulfillment of our souls. We fill ourselves up with temporary attractions rather than emptying ourselves out for eternal sustenance. And we never stop to ask ourselves why we concentrate on those things we know deep within our hearts can never truly make us happy. For the more we gain, it seems, the more we lose. We might be rich in worldly treasures, yet our souls are weary from their feeble compensations.

On this Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Matthew's Gospel is a treasure trove of spiritual content extraordinarily focused on what we must do to understand the kingdom of heaven and to live according to Jesus's expectations. It is difficult for us, perhaps, who are imbued only with human awareness, to think with a more panoramic view and to embrace ideas so anathema to our outlook. (I do believe, however, that the older one gets, the more one realizes there are many things in life that are not known and there are many things that are unknown unknowns.) We must trust in the words of Scripture to adopt this unlimited view of the kingdom of God based on Jesus's teaching and, more importantly, eliminate our own sense of self and self-indulgence in the process.

To be a Christian is to live with a sense of paradox and begin to grasp Jesus's declaration: "*For those who want to save their lives must lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?*" (Matthew 16:25–26). We must realize, despite our limited human understanding, that our eternal lives are not predicated on our *own needs and reflections of faith*, but on the needs of others and how we give ourselves to them. Each of us is in a unique relationship with our Lord that far surpasses anything we have ever known. This relationship stretches through time—past, present, and future—and transcends all we might experience here on earth. A world without end. . .with the promise of resurrection and eternal life.

*One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

—John Donne, poet

Yours in Christ,
Father Rudy