



September 8, 2013
Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Anyone who does not take up her/his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."—Luke 14:27

Dear Friends;

French artists, Henri Matisse and Auguste Renoir were close friends. Renoir was 28 years older than Matisse. During the last years of his life Renoir was severely crippled with arthritis. Nevertheless he would paint every day. Renoir was unable to bend his fingers to hold a paint brush correctly. So he had his wife, Alice, tie the brush to his hand so that he could continue to paint.

Matisse visited him daily. One morning he watched his friend wincing in excruciating pain with each colorful brush stroke. Matisse asked his friend, *"Auguste why do you continue to paint when you are in such agony?"* Renoir immediately responded, *"The beauty remains, the pain passes."* The passion Renoir had for his art drove him to paint until the day he died. His paintings of smiling faces, landscapes and still lifes of flowers and fruit are admired by millions. Their beauty shows us no shadow of the pain necessary to create them. Most of us agree that the *cost* was worth it.

Whether it is the pursuit of excellence in athletics, professional or technical excellence, all demand a price—years of practice, study, struggle, sacrifice and discipline. Many like Renoir are willing to endure all that it takes to pursue their passion and calling.

Jesus has a passionate vision—the coming reign of God. Jesus, our wise teacher, understands that reign will demand everything of those who pursue its justice and peace.

In Jesus' culture all the allegiances were based on blood ties. Everyone had their role. You did what your father did for work. You married your first cousin. Sons married and single remained in their father's house and under his control. Everyone watched and controlled everyone else. It could be a suffocating existence. The invitation of Jesus is to form a new kind of family based on a relationship with him. This new family would be bound together in the work of proclaiming the reign of God. This would have been a liberating and exhilarating opportunity.

However, the invitation of Jesus means that we must calculate the cost. To be a disciple means preferring Jesus and proclaiming the Good News to everything else including family and possessions. It takes passion like Renoir or the dedication of an athlete preparing for the Olympics. It means shaping my life by the vision of the kingdom and becoming its representative. This also means opposition from those who do not share the vision. That is the meaning of the cross. Like Jesus, are we willing to suffer for our dream of a world made new?

One of the important ways that we are invited to follow Jesus is in the way of non-violence. This week Pope Francis has asked that we pray and do penance for peace. He has emphatically called the nations of the world and the U.S. not to resort to more violence in Syria. It will only make things worse. The pope said *"Violence only begets more violence."* Pope Francis' words resonate with words spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King during the Vietnam War:

"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy...Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Let us take up the cross of Christ the way of non-violence and the only way that leads to lasting peace.

Pray for Peace,

Fr. Ron