

## Homily for 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

There were two brothers in Georgia during the 1950's. Both were Christians. Both attended church regularly. One decided that in opposition to the dominant culture of the day, he was going to participate in the formation of a desegregated community. The other worked as an attorney for a prominent law firm.

As you might suspect, the desegregated community ran into a great deal of opposition. As a result it was forced into court proceedings. The one brother asked his attorney brother to help them with the legal work. Knowing how opposed people were to this endeavor, he refused. The attorney told his brother that he could lose his job.

The brother reminded the attorney that he was supposed to be a Christian. The lawyer responded by saying: "I will follow Jesus to His cross...but it is **His** cross. I have no need to be crucified." To that his brother replied: "Oh, I understand. You are just an admirer of Jesus. You are not a follower of Jesus."

I think that all of us struggle between being an admirer of Jesus and being a follower, a disciple. An admirer sees Jesus as a truly good and wise teacher to be held in high esteem. The disciple, on the other hand, takes Jesus to heart.

Time and time again this distinction plays out in real life stories that would be easier for us to push aside but from which we cannot escape. Such was the case in 2006 when a gunman entered a one-room Amish School in Pennsylvania. The teacher and the boys were ordered to leave. The man then shot at all the girls in the class and ended by killing himself. Five children were killed and several were critically wounded. His motivation? “I’m angry at God for taking my little daughter” he told the children before the massacre began.

What was so stunning about this story were the actions of the Amish parents who brought words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had slain their children. The world was incredulous that such forgiveness could be offered quickly for such a heinous crime. The news media was so stunned by this story that the forgiveness offered by those who tragically lost their daughters eclipsed the violence and the anguish of the event.

The example of these Amish parents put me to shame then and continues to do so now. They had suffered the cruelest of losses. Yet in their loss they became a living reflection of Jesus Christ who came to teach us that hatred and vengeance, division and war, can have no rightful place in our hearts and in our lives. Here were a group of parents who let their faith shine through their actions. They were true disciples.

The Gospel today instructs the disciples to “shake the dust off their feet.” Some might interpret this as a condemnation of places where the disciples are not welcomed. But I wonder if it isn’t also an instruction to both the disciples and the rest of us to “shake off the dust” of feelings like resentment, anger, hatred and revenge in order to be free enough to let our faith in Jesus Christ shine not just in words but also in our actions.

In a world filled with so much hatred and division, anger and destruction, are we not in desperate need of true disciples of Jesus Christ and not just admirers?