

Catholic on the 'outside'

Little Jenny was misbehaving and really giving her mother a hard time. The mother told her to go sit in the corner and wait there until her father got home. She went over and stood in the corner but refused to sit, another symbol of her defiance. After another hassle, the mother literally forced the child to sit down. When the father came in, he asked her what she was doing and she said, 'Well, on the outside I'm sitting down but inside I'm still standing.'

It could be the same with us – on the outside we could appear more catholic than we really are.

Last Sunday Jesus told us to take the lowest place, the Sunday before he told us to enter by the narrow door and today he is asking us to put Him first in our lives – even before family ties.

Good relationships are important but they will have limited depth if there is scant sharing of faith among friends or family members. Relationships can also be shallow if one party has strong religious faith and the other doesn't. For instance I could have a rock solid belief in the existence of God that shapes my outlook on life, whereas my friend may have serious doubts. That can stretch a relationship in its own way.

A more ardent following of Jesus will mean that we have the resolve to follow Jesus in a more radical manner. We may start off well, like the man who half built the tower, and promise Our Lord the earth but slacken off when things get more demanding. For instance when we promise to bring our children up in the faith at their baptism we resolve to take them to Mass as often as possible even when something more enticing beckons. Coming to Mass should be the highlight of our week. In this way Jesus holds pride of place in our family and will help to keep it together. Marrying in Church also shows that you are taking an important component of your Catholic Faith seriously and not paying lip-service to it.

Or, like the little Jenny in the opening story we may pride ourselves on being catholic on the outside but inside ignore certain parts of church teaching or have adopted a way of thinking and acting not that much different from people with no professed belief. Jesus asks us to let the light of our faith shine out if it's important to us.

The onlookers started making fun of the man who left the tower half built. This could be one of the reasons why 'Fr Ted' was such a send-up for some – it portrayed Catholicism as a joke which not even the clergy, were taking seriously. Or some Catholics may have taken it seriously at first but then gradually lost their first fervour and followed the way of the world. Giving our Lord 'pride of place' in our lives calls for more faithfulness than that. Jesus says: “he who is not with me is against me” and that means with him in everything.

In the Old Testament God is described as a jealous God – he asks for all our love. If we do what He asks, and that seems to be what he's emphasising today in the gospel, then we are on track to share our lives with Him forever in an eternal exchange of love. That is worth dying for.

QUESTIONS

- 1. What, in the group's opinion, does it mean to put Jesus 'first in our lives'? Might putting Jesus first in our lives cause a rift between us and our family and friends who look at things differently from us? Discuss*
- 2. When people (less these days) use the term 'staunch catholic', what exactly do they mean?*
- 3. You hear about people who are committed Catholics for years but, all of a sudden, they just give up practicing. Could they be compared to the man in the gospel who half-build a tower and was unable to finish and the neighbours started to make fun of him etc...? Discuss*
- 4. Are people, do you think, put off the church because of a 'holier than thou' attitude of many who go or is it all 'in their mind'? Discuss*