

# 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Luke 14:25-33

When George Lucas was writing *Star Wars*, he said that he had to force himself to commit to writing. He would make himself sit down at his desk everyday for eight hours and he would not allow himself to leave his desk until 5:00 in the afternoon. On his wall in front of his desk he had a large calendar and each day was marked with the number of pages he was to write. He said that if he finished writing those pages early he was allow himself a break, but, he says, he never finished those pages early. The commitment that George Lucas made to his project meant that *Star Wars* is known not only to my generation but also to my nephew's generation. When I was born the first of the series was released. When my nephew was born the series was continuing into its sixth film. Without George Lucas's self-discipline we would not know the story of the Galactic Empire and the Rebel Alliance, we would not know the names of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vadar, or Han Solo and Princess Leia, and we would not know who Luke's real father is. That story was written not at anybody else's insistence, not because anyone else was forcing George Lucas to write, but because he alone chose to commit himself to something in which he believed. His project was not nearly as important to anyone else as it was to him.

The Lord said that to be a disciple demands as much commitment as building a tower or a king marching into war. Neither of these can be done with any apathy or lacklustre. If they are the tower, if ever built, will undoubtedly collapse, and the army will certainly be defeated.

When the Lord sat in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his death He prayed that the cup of suffering that He was His passion and death would be taken from Him so that He would not have to bear the humiliation of the

people calling for his death, the torture of His guards, of seeing the agony on His mother's face, of carrying the thing that was to be His instrument of execution as though paying for the bullet that would kill Him.

There is something very interesting about the geography of the Mount of Olives, the place of the garden. On one side of the garden is the city of Jerusalem and on the other side is the open desert. Christ, the night before His death sat between the place of His execution and the place of escape; He could choose between running to the desert and hiding from the Jews and the Roman guards or to turn and make His way back to the city and to His execution. We know what He chose.

What, however, if He had not chosen death? To a great extent the sacrifice of Christ is taken for granted. I don't know of anyone who has truly considered the consequences of the alternative. Say there was no arrest in the garden that night, no trial before the Sanhedrin, no meeting with Pontius Pilate, no Cross, no crucifixion? Where would we be now? Who would we be now? We would not be sitting in a church before an altar to celebrate the sacrifice of Christ, for there would never have been a sacrifice. We would not be a part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church that has existed for two-thousand years and claims over one-billion people, for there would be no Church. Death would be all there is for there would be no resurrection. Two-thousand years of history, billions upon billions of people, countless Saints, innumerable miracles, faith in God, hope in eternal life, love that breaches the boundaries of hate, would not exist. In fact, we would not have number this year as 2022 for there would be no *Anno Domini*, or Year of the Lord—no point in history in which we would claim definitively that God has broken into human history. Maybe we would number this year as 5782 as do the Jews, or 1443 as do the Moslems. There would be no universities, no hospitals, no schools, no juries—or at least not as we know them today. And all of this because Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Messiah, the Saviour of the World, would not take up His

cross. So, thanks be to God that He did.

So what is the Cross I must take? The Cross is not about my infinite worth, it is about the infinite worth of God and the immensity of my sin. For me to take up my Cross I must admit that I am from the dust and that I shall return to the dust, that I was born into sin and that I have chosen sin, that Heaven is not guaranteed to me but that Hell always has been. To take up my cross means that I take responsibility and that I submit humbly to the Lord. I accept that my suffering is the consequence of my sin and of the sin of others, and that I have contributed to the evil of the world just as I am subject to the evil of the world, and that there is no freedom except in Him crucified. To take up my Cross I must, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “[strive] to please God rather than men, always ready to abandon everything for Christ” (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 4).