

During the Second World War the Seabees had this proud motto: "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer." Today's gospel seems to be asking the same of Christians.

The difficult is assumed; we are challenged to do the impossible. The difficult is the command to carry our cross. The impossible is twofold: to hate our family, and to renounce all our possessions. He could have said this for one of three reasons:

1. Hating is rather baffling to our ears in light of all that he said of loving one another and forgiving. It's called hyperbole, an exaggeration used to make an important point, something said for its dramatic effect, for its shock value, to help people see some deeper meaning or hidden truth.

Jesus often used hyperbole to make an important point, like when he once said, "If your eye is an occasion of sin, pluck it out, or if your hand is an occasion of sin, cut it off." People understood what he said was hyperbole and not to be taken in a literal way.

2. We should also note that this passage was written during a time of persecution. Converts to Christianity were often disowned by their own families, betrayed by them to the authorities, or publicly shunned. Faith had to be a priority over family. The family is no longer to be defined by blood.

3. Thirdly, he may have been speaking to his Disciples. It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be disciple is to give our life totally to Jesus. In our day, we might say it is the difference between an average parishioner who follows vs. that of life of total holiness, an impossible virtue for most of us.

Yes, some are called to the seemingly impossible – greatness, but we are all called to choose the way of Christ above all things. As Matthew reads, "Whoever loves his father and mother, his son and daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me." Difficult, and for some, impossible. It is just a matter of how far do you wish to go with your faith – how more do you want to be a disciple rather than just a follower? Once a month attendee, twice or faithful in every way?

The second seemingly impossible command of this gospel is to renounce all of one's possessions. Obviously, most of us cannot do this, but we can decide what it is we shall place the most value in life.

+A visitor to a leper colony once watched a nun bathe and bandage an infected leper. The visitor remarked, "Sister, I would not do what you do for a million dollars." The nun answered quietly, "Neither would I."

Many ordinary Christians, mothers and fathers, grandparents and guardians, often perform heroic service within their families, which no one else would do for any amount of money. If our possessions get into the way of our relationships – particularly Jesus - then get rid of it.

However, the ideals of today's gospel, even in proper context, do border on the impossible for most of us. True, many of us do not always live up to these gospel values, but we can maintain them as our ideals.

+As the poet Browning put it, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for:"

Just as the Seabees may say, "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer", so too our Seabee saints. They understand that nothing is impossible, when we are willing to surrender to God.

One such person is Mother Teresa who is to be canonized today. She shows us the impossible is possible for all of us who are willing to be Disciples.

Though so much of her young life was centered in the Church, Mother Teresa later revealed that until she reached 18, she had never thought of being a nun..

However, by 18 years of age, Agnes (as known then) waved good-bye to her little family, whom she would never see again (gave away all), and she stepped onto the train alone bound for the motherhouse of the Sisters of Our Lady of Loretto in Dublin, Ireland.

From there, she boarded a ship for India, which arrived there 37 days later.

*In 1931 she made her first vows, there choosing her religious name Teresa (after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Teresa of Avila).

After making her temporary vows, Sister Teresa went to Calcutta for her first assignment. She moved to the pristine campus of St. Mary's High School, which served girls from wealthy Indian families. Sister Teresa was quite content at St. Mary's, where she would spend 17 years.

She considered herself the happiest nun in the community, though her life there was one of routine responsibility. She prayed and taught, and then she did it again the next day. The sisters who lived with her considered her to be ordinary, quiet, and shy.

But on September 10, 1946, something out of the ordinary took place in Sister Teresa's life. On this day, which she later referred to as "Inspiration Day," she heard God speak to her while she was traveling by train and for a time afterward.

In one vision, there was the crowd of the poor calling out to save them. In another, she saw Our Lady kneeling among the poor saying, "Take care of them, and bring them to my son." Then she saw Jesus among the poor as the crucified Christ, calling out to her.

She understood that God was asking her work among the poorest of the poor in India. Once again, she left all she had behind, trusting Jesus, to live among the poor and be a Disciple. What we did not know until recently that the visions ended and for the duration of her life - 50 years - she experienced a painful darkness and a loss of God's presence: "In my soul I feel just that terrible pain o loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not existing." And yet the impossible taking a bit longer, her faith prevailed to certainty of sainthood.

As one put it, "In Mother Teresa's dark night, we can hear all the anguish of her century — the desolation of the poor, the cries of the unwanted children, of the atheist, of all those who

can't murmur a prayer or feel to love anymore. It was as if in some way she was bearing their sufferings and also sharing in the sufferings of Christ. As she wrote, "The closer we come to Jesus the better we will know his thirst."

To minister to the poorest of the poor, she had to become like them in all ways: their feelings of being abandoned and forgotten. For 50 years she fed them with those visions she experienced, that they are not alone and they are loved. With God, all things are possible.