Now and then I have this sort of dream about politicians and that dream is that one day we will have a politician who will say something like the following: “People of America, I know that you are looking to me to fix your problems but the truth is that most of your problems are the result of decisions you have made or circumstances about which I can do nothing. So if you elect me I might be able to get a couple of road projects taken care of or streamline the application process for a new business, but otherwise don’t look to me to make you happier, to improve your relationships or make you smarter and more fulfilled, because I can’t do it.” But, of course, politicians don’t tell us such things. Instead they assure us that by electing them they will fix all of our problems and we can stay exactly the same. And I don’t necessarily blame the politicians because they are just doing what has been shown to work in terms of getting elected. They know that we want an easy fix to complex problems and so that is what they sell. And so knowing this we can also conclude something from this morning’s Gospel which is that Jesus would not make a very good politician. The reason I say this is because he does not tell us that things can be done cost free, but that there are trade offs in the things that we do. He says this, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” The formula that Jesus gives us to be his disciple involves a lot of things that we may not want to do. And this is why I said he would not make a very good politician because I am pretty sure that no one’s campaign slogan has ever been “Pick up your cross and vote for me.” But reality is often harsh, but is it as harsh as Jesus makes it sound in these verses?

Well, he is obviously saying that there will be sacrifices that we have to make in order to follow him, but the question that I am sure everyone is asking is if we really have to hate our parents and children? Well let’s take a little deeper look and see if we can decipher what he is getting at. The bit about hating your parents seems to violate number five of the Ten Commandments which says to honor your mother and father – honoring can be a little hard when you hate someone. And when you see seeming contradictions in the Bible a good place to start in resolving those is to go the original language. So let’s look at the Greek and see if there is some nuance.

The word translated as hate is *miseo* and is actually a little different than the word hate, or at least has a little more space for interpretation. It does not actually mean anger or hostility but rather, according to the commentaries that, “if there is a conflict, one's response to the demands of discipleship must take precedence over even the most sacred of human relationships.” What Jesus is pointing out here is the supremacy of our relationship with God. I don’t know if this will be helpful but in some ways this understanding is similar to the conflicts that can arise between parents and their children. So, for example, if your child comes home and says that their friend Jimmy Donnelly wants to set up a meth lab in your basement and if you don’t let Jimmy do it your child will become a social outcast, you are most likely going to tell them that you don’t care about their social status and that this meth lab is not going to happen (if this is not your reaction we might need to talk after the service). Parents will say that their with their child and the rules entailed in that relationship take precedence over the child’s relationship to their friend. Meaning in practical terms the relationship between the child and their friend will come in second. And it is not just in our relationship with our children that there is a hierarchy we have hierarchies in most our relationships and so really all Jesus is telling us is that there is one relationship that trumps all others and that is our relationship with him. In being a disciple of Jesus we may have to ignore the demands of some aspects of our relationship with other people. Or put in different terms with God we cannot say that all of the other kids are doing it. So what does this mean in practical terms? Well, it could mean quite a bit.

This past week we remembered the Martyrs of New Guinea. For those of you not familiar with their story the very quick version is that during World War II there were 11 Christians (nine non-native missionaries and two indigenous missionaries) who were killed by Japanese invaders or allied tribes in Papua New Guinea in 1942. We honor their sacrifice but there is another remarkable piece to this story and I think it does a good job of articulating the supremacy of our relationship with God. As communication was rather difficult in Papua New Guinea there was a twice-daily broadcast that went out from the Diocesan offices to pass on news and information to the staffs of the mission stations. As the invaders drew closer the Bishop thought that he should address the missionaries and faithful about what might be coming. He stated, “As far as I know, you are all at your posts, and I am very glad and thankful about this. I have, from the first, felt that we must endeavor to carry on our work in all circumstances, no matter what the cost may ultimately be to any of us individually. God expects this of us. The Church at home, which sent us out, expects this of us. The Universal Church expects it. The tradition and history of missions requires it of us. Missionaries who have been faithful to the uttermost and are now at rest are surely expecting it of us. The people whom we serve expect it of us. Our own consciences expect it of us. We could never hold up our faces again if, for our own safety, we all forsook Him and fled when the shadows of the Passion began to gather round Him in His Spiritual and Mystical Body, the Church in Papua.” He concluded saying, “I cannot foretell the future. I cannot guarantee that all will be well--that we shall all come through unscathed. One thing only I can guarantee is that, if we do not forsake Christ here in Papua in His Body, the Church, He will not forsake us. He will uphold us; He will sustain us; He will strengthen us, and He will guide and keep us through the days that lie ahead . . . Let us trust and not be afraid."

Now obviously for most of us the Japanese are not invading and so we may not be asked to prioritize God in such a way that it will cost us our actual physical life, but it may cost us parts of our life. It may be in the form of an unhealthy relationship, a bad habit or a particular personality trait. When we follow Christ our lives are supposed to be different because of the priority that we give to God. And I would suspect that most of you are like me having good places and not so good ones. We may have no problem in submitting certain parts of our life to God but in other places we are holding on to the old self. And so I want to encourage all of you, myself included, to take a moment this week and think about those things in our lives that still take priority over God and pray that that may change. That those things which are not glorifying to God will be subsumed by our discipleship to Jesus. Prioritizing that relationship above all others so that we may be fully his now and forevermore.