

My goodness this is a demanding Gospel. “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

I can take some of the sting out by reminding you the same Word of God commands us to love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ... even enemies. But it's just that in comparison to the total love, affection and obedience we have for God, what we have for others must be very different and very less. It's a Semitic way of talk. The Old Testament says Jacob loved Rachel and hated Leah. Well, he had 10 children with Leah, so he couldn't have hated her that much. But in comparison to what he felt towards Rachel, he hated Leah.

The straight bald unadorned truth of the reading is that for us, God and Jesus must always come first. And when other less created things comes first, it always seems like a good idea at the time, but later produces disorder and darkness.

I asked people at parish meetings to share what they had put ahead of God. The answers felt familiar. At times I have put my job ahead of God, pleasing my girlfriend, going along with my husband, music, food, my work, my own way, softball or other sports, making my children happy, feeding my own anger or my own pride. Some of the bishops from the sex abuse scandals could have admitted: “At times I put the Church ahead of God.”

Most of that stuff, most, isn't bad. It's good, isn't it. Work, church, making someone you love happy, music or movies. It's just that when they're allowed to be more important in your life than God ... it's great for awhile and then leads to utter darkness.

So let's listen to the challenge of Jesus, who loves us more than anything except God. Let's ask for such clarity of mind, purity of heart and holiness of will that we love lots of things ... but above all we love God ... more than father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, work, possessions ... and even life itself.