

Dear Saint John Neumann Family,

Today's Gospel (Mt 16:21-27) places before us the invitation to be Disciples of Christ. After rebuking Peter, Jesus tells us, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Come After Me

These are simple yet deep words: "Whoever wishes to come after me . . ." Jesus places before us the choice: do we want to "come after" him? Do we desire to put Him first? Do we trust Him? Are we tired of trying to gather trophies and ready to live for God? As we ponder this invitation of Jesus to us we are reminded of His first encounter with the Apostles at the shore of Galilee: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). Jesus does not impose the Gospel, He proposes it. The Father makes the same proposal at the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him" (Mt 17:5). Being a disciple, "coming after Jesus," begins with listening to Him. He is first. The Gospel is first. Not our emotions. Not our reactions. Not our preferences. Not our anxieties or complexes or ideas. Jesus is re-proposing to us the first and greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength" (Dt 6:5). And this is the freedom of the human heart, to be convinced that our lives are better, that we are better, that our families are better, when God is first.

The Gospel of the Family

If there is a particular aspect of Jesus' teaching that we are in need of listening to today, it is His teaching on the family; not simply His moral teachings but the healing power of a vibrant Sacramental life rooted in the truth of the Gospel to restore marriages, to deliver souls from addiction, and to bring forgiveness and peace where there is brokenness. No one comes from a perfect family. No one has a perfect family. But every family belongs to God (cf. Eph 3:14-15). The family is neither a social construct nor a political tool. The family is God's original project. It is a living reflection of Divine Love. It is where we are called to begin our lives and to be formed in our original vocation to love. There is perhaps no witness more urgent than that of people today encountering and discovering the joy and beauty of the Christian family, a family built upon the enduring marriage of one man and one woman who are faithful to each other and open to the gift of having children, and who seek to find their unity and peace in Jesus Christ.

The Family Project

To this end, beginning this fall and coinciding with the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in Rome this October, we will embark on a Year of the Family in our parish. Let me be clear: these faith formation experiences are not for perfect families. They are for you, for your family, for your marriage, for your children. Whether you are married, single, divorced, separated, widowed, going through an annulment, or in counseling, you are invited to these faith encounters. There are four: (1) The Family Project (a 12 week DVD "beginner's course" on the identity and vocation of Christian marriage and family life that will coincide with Wednesday evening Religious Education, Sept. 24 – Dec 17 th at 7PM); (2) Saint John Paul II's Letter to Families (a four-week spiritual program on Tuesday evenings, Oct. 7 th – 28 th at 7:15PM); (3) The Biblical Vision of the Family (an in-depth 13 week bible study on the Catholic vision of marriage and family and the complementarity of men and women in marriage, on Tuesday evenings beginning in February 2015); and (4) The Healing of Families (a parish retreat-mission to take part in the summer or fall of 2015). Please take this invitation to prayer. Please give the Gospel a chance to bring healing to your marriage and peace to your family. Let us put the Lord first and respond with simplicity as He re-proposes the Gospel to us all. Let us trust in His promise: "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

In the Heart of Mary,

Mother and Queen of Families,

Fr. Joe Rogers, pastor