

# **FOLLOW ME**

(Christian Discipleship in Markan perspectives)



**New Priests**

**Major Archieparchy of Trivandrum**

**2013**

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## Acknowledgment

It is our humble attempt to expose the topic “Follow Me” the Marikan perspectives of discipleship. On this great moment we bow our heads before God Almighty for the enlightenment and blessing which He has been showering upon us abundantly. We praise and thank God for His grace during the process of the realization of this work.

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**THE SYRO-MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH  
MAJOR ARCHDIOCESE OF TRIVANDRUM**

**MESSAGE**

I am very happy and proud to know that the New Priests of the Major Archdiocese of Trivandrum of the year 2013 are publishing a book on Markan theology of discipleship to perpetuate the blessed memory of their Priestly Ordination. This book is the fruit of their years of meditation and penetrating study on the biblical topic of christian discipleship. Biblical discipleship is a model of how Christians could and should live their lives in reflection to Jesus' example and His mission. It involves not only a personal faith in God, but sharing that faith with other people, and building up a community of disciples. It is interesting to note how Markan theology of discipleship develops starting from Call and Response to Markan Christology and Eucharist.

I congratulate and appreciate our New Priests for their strenuous effort and dedication to bring this book into light. I wish and pray that this book may lead many young truth-seekers to reach in Christ and His Church. I also take this opportunity to appreciate all the Professors of St. Mary's Malankara Major Seminary who inspired and guided the New Priests in fulfilling their long cherished dream of publishing this book. May this book remain a source of information and inspiration to all!

May God bless you all!

Yours Lovingly,

+Baselios Cleemis

January 23, 2013

✠ **Baselios Cardinal Cleemis**  
Major Archbishop-Catholicos  
of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church &  
Major Archbishop of Trivandrum.

## Forward

There was a time when Mark had very little fame as a theologian. His poor language and simple way of narrating the events in the life of Jesus gave him a reputation as a straight forward reporter of events without subjecting them to any personal view or theological reflection. This reputation gave him another sort of fame as the most dependable NT author to reconstruct the history of Jesus. But this situation was drastically changed by the middle of the last century with new methods of interpretation of the NT like form criticism, literary criticism and redaction criticism. Today no NT scholar will go to Mark for the original and pure history about the life of Jesus. The fame which John had once as the greatest theologian of the NT is now contested by Mark, the writer of the shortest gospel.

Many are the theological themes Mark has developed through his story of Jesus. Truly we can say he is a great mission theologian, a great advocate of universalistic thinking on salvation, an original thinker on forgiveness of sins through repentance, a great Christologist and a profound contributor for a theology of discipleship and many more. The power of Mark to suggest theology in silence or with few words is recognized by Markan specialists today. Though he has a wide spectrum of theological thinking, these are not unconnected and independent theological disciplines, but are very intimately linked together. The thread that keeps them together is his idea of Jesus, his Christology. It is Christ who has filled Mark's thought and imagination. That is why he has ventured to write a gospel which he qualifies as "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1). But Christ is looked at from a variety of perspectives and each perspective forms

into a particular discipline in Mark's theology. The most prominent perspective of looking at Jesus is the perspective of the disciple. What is Jesus from the perspective of a disciple? This is the most important question he asks in a non-verbal way all through the gospel. This question both deepens the disciple's knowledge of Jesus and changes the very being of the disciple transforming him after the model of Christ. Thus in Mark, Christology and theology of discipleship remain so intimately linked to each other as two sides of the same coin. One knows the disciple as much as one knows Jesus and one knows Jesus to the extent one knows the disciple. Therefore one can boldly summarize Markan theology of discipleship as the other side of Christology or we can say living the life of Jesus Christ in the life of the human being is discipleship.

It is interesting to note the complimentary ways in which Jesus reveals himself and gives expression to his idea of a disciple. There are three important passion predictions in the gospel (8:31; 9:31; 10:33) all of which are completed with a teaching on how to be a disciple. Disciple is one who continues the life of the master; one who shares the destiny of the master. Jesus is the man condemned by humans and carries the cross, the instrument of his execution. This same is the destiny of the disciple. He is one who carries the cross and goes behind the master.

Marks' theology of discipleship begins with the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus begins his mission with the proclamation that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was near (1:1). He demanded two reactions from his audience - repentance and faith in the gospel. The first persons to give a positive response to this demand are the four disciples when Jesus called them from the sea of Galilee. There Jesus goes to the sea, sees the four and calls them. The inward sight of Jesus, the sight of the

inward reality of these men prompted Jesus to invite them to be his disciples. It is a “seeing” that forms the basis of the call and the following. They follow Him all through His public life upto the arrest. But they do not follow Him in His passion and death. Passion and death remain as events which separate the disciples and Jesus. They are not able to follow Him in His passion and death. They are very personal events which cannot be imitated by others. Yet the following is not stopped there. There is a second phase of the following. It is after the resurrection. It is following Jesus who is going to Galilee. (16:7) “Going to Galilee” means to take up the mission. This time (after the resurrection) it is the second phase of Jesus’ mission. The disciples have to follow Jesus in this second phase of the mission. But they are not alone. Jesus is with them. They have only to follow Him. But this time it is not the visible Jesus, Jesus in his body, who goes before them, but Jesus in his invisibility. In the first phase, in his body Jesus saw them and called them to follow him. Now it is the disciples in their bodily existence who have to see Jesus in the process of following the missionary Jesus. They will see him in Galilee. This is the promise (16;7). Once Jesus saw them and called them and they followed. This time it is they who have to see the invisible Jesus in the process of missioning. This is the challenge. The challenge becomes easy to carry out as the disciple follows the cross – bearing Jesus.

Marks’ theology of discipleship is most brilliant. It forms an inclusion in the gospel. It begins the gospel (1:16-20) and brings it to a close (16:7). Every thing is narrated within this inclusion formed by discipleship. It is a mutual - seeing the master seeing the disciple and the disciple seeing the master. That is the Christian gospel, the gospel of Jesus who is Christ and Son of God.

**Rev. Dr. Philip Chempakassery**



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## General Introduction

The Gospel of St. Mark belongs to the first set of books in the canonical order of the New Testament namely the Gospels. It is again one of the synoptics, the first three gospels which show remarkable common traits among them and differences from the gospel of John. The Gospel of St. Mark is the gist of all the synoptic gospels. The gospel of St. Mark is the first written gospel so far as we know from studies. The other two synoptic gospels are interpretations and embellishment of the information that is given in the gospel of St. Mark. According to the tradition of the Fathers and to the majority of scholars, the gospel of St. Mark was written by a man called John Mark, a close associate of St. Peter, the head of Apostles and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. From this we come to a conclusion that the gospel of St. Mark is essentially the gospel preached by St. Peter and St. Paul.

Majority of scholars are of the opinion that the gospel of Mark is written by 68 A.D. It seems that this gospel is a passion narrative with a long introduction. The evangelist tries to give a positive emphasis to persecution. 'Discipleship' is one of the central themes of the gospel of St. Mark. Persecution is the reward for discipleship. Here the evangelist connects the central theme with persecution.

The main purpose of this gospel is to challenge the people. The word 'to follow' is repeated many times in the gospel. From this we understand that the gospel is to invite people to become disciples of Jesus. Those who are able to follow Jesus are Jesus' disciples. Though Jesus is the central figure in the Gospel story, He is never presented there as an isolated figure but always as accompanied by his disciples. It is significant that the first public act that Jesus does in the Gospel of Mark, after the initial proclamation of the Good News (Mk. 1:14-15), is the calling of the first four disciples by the sea of Galilee. They were called to "follow" Jesus so that He might make them "fishers of men" (Mk. 1:17). This book tries to develop the idea of discipleship as given in Mark. Discipleship is essentially a life of following Jesus.

In the first chapter the speciality of the call by Jesus is explained by analyzing the scenes of the calling of disciples in all the four Gospels. This is very helpful in understanding the scriptural theology of the calling and commissioning of Jesus' disciples. It is also useful in understanding the New Testament idea of discipleship and the historical background of the calling of Christ's disciples. At the same time, the uniqueness of the scene of the calling of disciples in St. Mark is explained in contrast with the other three Gospel scenes. In the second chapter we discuss and analyze the term "his disciples" which occurs very frequently in Mark.

The third chapter deals with the fundamental characteristic features of discipleship. We can see a gradual growth in the disciple's life while following Jesus. Jesus' disciple stands in radical contrast against the disciples of the Rabbis of that time. The fundamental characteristics of Jesus' disciple are (1) initiative from the part of the master, (2) total mortification by the disciples, (3) life-long formation and (4) call to the service of the Gospel. All the four characteristics are very particular in the life of Jesus and the mission of the disciple is the same as that of his Master. The destiny of the Master is granted to the disciples also.

The fourth chapter is an attempt to see the etymological meaning of the term 'following'. An etymological analysis would help to a great extent to know what it means "to follow". General understanding of following gives an outlook of the secular form of following. The distinctiveness in following Jesus is elucidated so that a disciple could get into the life of Jesus. The fifth chapter is a study on the Uniqueness of Following Jesus .

The sixth chapter, "following Jesus: an invitation to glorification through passion" presents the real nature of Jesus' discipleship. One cannot follow Jesus without undertaking a journey to glorification through passion. Discipleship is a journey to Jerusalem, the place of passion and from Jerusalem to Galilee, the place of mission. In

chapter seven, "Being a disciple is a mission of being human" we discuss in detail the human aspect of discipleship. The practicality of discipleship is explained briefly emphasizing the witnessing aspect as being human.

Chapter eight, "Holy Eucharist, A gift par excellence for the one who follow Jesus" tries to present the significance of Holy Eucharist in Christian discipleship. It is Jesus' self gift to his followers. The gift aspect of Holy Eucharist is discussed especially in relation to OT notion of 'Manna' as God's gift. 'Manna' is a pre-figuration of Holy Eucharist. Encountering God in Holy Eucharist is the core of the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

In the conclusion part, the practicality of Christian discipleship is explained. This part tries to bring to light the follower of Jesus today especially in the scenario of the year of faith. Faith is human's positive response to the self revelation of God. Discipleship is as an act of following Jesus in the present era, very relevant especially in the context of the year of faith.

Divine call to follow Jesus is a gracious gift to humankind. All aspirations to become a genuine disciple of Jesus should begin by the act of following Jesus. The more one 'follow' Jesus, the more one become a disciple of Jesus. So contemplation on the different dimensions of the command of Jesus 'Follow Me' is a necessary pre-requisite for becoming a genuine disciple of Jesus.

## Chapter One

### Specialty of the Call of Jesus

Call by Jesus has certain characteristic features. In order to grasp the uniqueness of the calling by Jesus we have to understand the Gospel scenes of calling.

In the gospel of St. Matthew we can identify three scenes of calling. They are the calling of the first disciples (4:18-22); the calling of Matthew (9:9-13); and the calling and commissioning of the twelve (10:1-5)

The first scene of calling of disciples in St. Matthew is narrated in chapter 4. In 4:18-22 we read about the calling of first disciples of Jesus namely Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John. Like other synoptic gospels Matthew also give emphasis to sudden response from the part of disciples to the call of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The lack of preparation, the simple command given by Jesus and the immediate response etc underline the attractiveness of Jesus. Matthew does not offer any explanation for the disciple's apparently sudden decision to follow Jesus.

Calling of Matthew is presented as the second scene of calling of disciples in the gospel of St. Matthew. We read about this event in chapter 9 versus 9 to 13. But Matthew omits the information in Mark 2: 13 about Jesus' preaching in the seashore.<sup>2</sup> In Matthew Jesus' encounter with Matthew, the tax collector is direct. In Mark and Luke,

the name of the tax collector is Levi. In the response of Mathew, the tax collector also we can identify a kind of sudden response to the call of Jesus.

The third and important scene of calling of disciples in the gospel of St Matthew is given in chapter 10 verses 1 to 15. It takes material from Mark 6: 7 and 3: 13-15 and is accompanied by the Matthean characteristic expression “to heal every disease and every infirmity”.<sup>3</sup> The list of disciples in the version of St. Matthew is an edited version of Mark 3:16-19. Matthew has arranged the twelve names in six pairs and provides further information in a few places. Simon Peter is “first”, Andrew is, “his brother”; and Mathew is, “the tax collector”. Jesus gave disciples the authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every disease and every infirmity. In chapters eight and nine Matthew tries to project the authority of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Now this authority is shared with the twelve.

In the Gospel of Luke we can identify three scenes of the calling of disciples; the calling of the first disciples (5:1-7), the calling of a tax collector (5:27-39); and the calling of the twelve (6:12-19).

The first scene of calling of disciples, that is, the calling of the first disciples is in chapter 5. Jesus was standing on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret. Jesus went on board the boat of Simon and began to teach the crowd.<sup>5</sup> After preaching, Jesus commanded Simon to ‘cast his nets for a catch’. Jesus’ command put Peter’s faith to the test.

Simon knew from his long experience that it is not possible to catch fish at that time. But he believed in Jesus. When Simon got fish, he understood that in Jesus, God is revealing himself<sup>6</sup>. This amazement and alarm at the unexpected catch of fish had also taken hold of Zebedee's two sons, James and John. Jesus said to Simon that he is to haul men into God's Kingdom.

The second scene of calling of disciples is that of the calling of a tax collector. It is also narrated in chapter five. Through this scene St. Luke once more closes his account of Jesus' powerful office by describing how he called a disciple to follow him. Tax collectors were regarded as public sinners. The power of Jesus' glance and the word by which he called him was so great that the tax collector left everything he had, and became a disciple of Jesus.

The third and last scene of calling of disciples in the Gospel of St. Luke is described in chapter 6. There we read about the calling of the twelve. Before he called the twelve, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer. From among the number of disciples who had followed him, he picked out twelve. There is a number of distinctive features about St. Luke's version of the list of Apostles. He puts the three disciples whose calling he described (5:1-11) in the first place. Andrew is introduced as Simon's brother. The other Simon is given the nick name "Zealot". James who occurs in the third group is described as the son of Alpheus. Judas Iscariot is called a "traitor".



The Gospel of St. John is remarkably different from the synoptic Gospels. This characteristic difference can also be seen in the Johanine narration of the calling of disciples.

In the Gospel of St. John, we can identify mainly two scenes of the calling of disciples. The two scenes are narrated in the first chapter of the Gospel itself. The calling of the first disciples (1:35-42) and the calling of Philip and Nathanael(1:43-51) are the two scenes.

The story of the calling of first disciples as narrated by the Gospel is very unique. The synoptic Gospels lack this story. The narration begins with the testimony of John, the Baptist.<sup>7</sup> He was standing with two of his disciples. Seeing Jesus passing by, he identifies Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (1:36). Hearing their master’s witness, two of John’s disciples followed Jesus. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother (1:40) the other is not named. When Jesus saw them, he asked a question, “What do you want?”. The two disciples of the Baptist begin their response by addressing Jesus as ‘Rabbi’. It was a common term of admiration addressed by a student to his master. They asked a question to Jesus “Where are you staying”? Jesus responded - “come, and see”. This constituted the beginning of their intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. They spent the rest of the day with him. The first thing Andrew did on the following day was to find his brother, Simon and announce, “We have found the Messiah” (1:41).

In the second scene two more are added to the list of Jesus' disciples: Philip and Nathanael. We read the incident in 1:43-51. When Jesus decided to go to Galilee, he saw Philip and called him. Philip's witness to Nathanael is somewhat similar to that of Andrew's testimony except that he does not call Jesus the Messiah but "the one Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote" (1:45). In the words, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph" (1:45), Philip provides exactly the kind of information that positively identifies a man in first century Palestine: the name of his village, and the name of his father. Nathanael was from Galilee. This is the reason of the scathing question.<sup>8</sup> Philip responded with the only satisfactory response possible: "Come and see" Honest inquiry is sovereign cure for prejudice. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching him, He said "Here is a true Israelite" (1:41). The display of the special supernatural knowledge about Nathanael by Jesus and the witness of Philip, removed Nathanael's doubt immediately<sup>9</sup>. He addressed Jesus as Rabbi. He said "You are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel" (1:49).

In the Gospel of St. Mark, we come across three important scenes of the calling of disciples. They are the calling of the first disciples (1:16-20); calling of Levi (2:13-14) and the appointment of the twelve (3:13-19 a).

The calling of the first disciples is seen in 1: 16-20. All the three Synoptic Gospels narrate this story.<sup>10</sup> St. Matthew copied almost word by word of what is in the

Gospel of St. Mark. But in Luke there are certain differences in the story. As the first act of the Galilean mission Mark reports the calling of Simon and Andrew to be fishers of men. Jesus' word to Simon and Andrew was remembered for its vividness and urgency: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (1:17). This first invitation becomes a paradigm for the subsequent call narratives (2:13-15; 3:13-19; 6:6-13)

The call story consists of the following elements;

1. Those who are called are engaged in ordinary work.
2. The call is in the form of a clear summons to "follow me".
3. The response to the call is immediate and unreflective.

Simon and Andrew abandon their nets and immediately follow Jesus. On this same occasion Jesus sees the sons of Zebedee, James and John, in their boat preparing the nets for another night's fishing. On the call of Jesus, they also abandon their father, the servants, the boat and nets and commit themselves exclusively to follow Jesus.

According to the majority of the biblical scholars the text of the calling of the first disciples is a crucial text for the interpretation of the Gospel by virtue of its primary position. It anticipates the call of the Twelve in 3:13-19 and their subsequent mission in 6:7-13, but looks beyond this point to the conclusion of the Gospel<sup>11</sup>. "Jesus affirms his relationship to those called in terms of a program for the future; "he will make them fishers for people". What they will become depends upon their following him. The

initial command to follow Jesus receives a final and dramatic extension in the concluding resurrection stories. Mark implies that the promise to be made fishers for people finds its fulfillment in the meeting in Galilee promised in 16: 7.

The second scene of calling of disciples is the calling of Levi. We read about this event in 2: 13 - 14. In Mark 2:13, we read about Jesus' preaching in the seashore. In Marks Jesus' encounter with Matthew, the tax collector is direct. In the Gospel of Mathew, the name of the tax collector is Levi. In the response of Levi also we can identify a kind of sudden response to the call of Jesus<sup>12</sup>.

The third and important scene of calling of disciples in the gospel of Mark is described in 3 : 13-19. The list of disciples is given in Mark 3:16-19. Mathew edited this list in his gospel. "Jesus called to him whom he wanted" (Mk.3:13). From this it is very clear that the master chooses his disciples all by himself. Jesus gave a new name to the selected twelve, "apostles" (Mk. 3:14). But originality of this verse is doubtful. The intention of the appointment is to be with Jesus and to be sent out to proclaim the Gospel and to cast out demons. After this the list of the twelve apostles is given.

## Chapter Two

### The Term “His disciples” in the Gospel of Mark

Generally the term “his disciples” is used in the Gospel to indicate the disciples of Jesus Christ. In the gospel the term “his disciples” often seems to correspond to “the twelve”. This is clear from an analysis of the text of the passion narratives in the gospel of Mark. We see passion prediction in ch. 8: 27 -10, 52. The general characteristic features of the three passion predictions is that each passion prediction is followed by a teaching on discipleship. The texts are given below.<sup>13</sup>

8: 27-32	first passion prediction
8: 33-34	teaching on discipleship
9: 28-31	second passion prediction
9: 32-35	teaching on discipleship
10: 32-34	third passion prediction
10: 41-42	teaching on discipleship

When we join the three passion predictions with the teachings on discipleship we get six units. Among these six units the first three are addressed to “his disciples” and last three is to “the twelve”. This is demonstrated below.

8: 27-32	First passion prediction to the disciples.
8: 33-34	Teaching is to the disciples.
9: 28-31	Second passion prediction is to the disciples.

- 9: 32-35 Teaching is to the twelve.  
10: 32-34 Third passion prediction to the twelve.  
10: 41-42 Teaching is to the twelve.

There are different groups of disciples of Jesus in the Gospel. But when we analyze the structure of the text of passion predictions, we understand that there is a deliberate attempt to narrow down the group of disciples to “the twelve” from the first prediction to the third prediction. Even though in the restricted sense the term “his disciples” is used to indicate “the twelve” in the gospel of mark, the use of the term “his disciples” in its extended sense becomes evident in many instances in the Gospel narration. The term is already used from Ch. 2: 15 onwards even before the appointing of the twelve. In many occasions the group of disciples with Jesus is not limited to the twelve (4:10). We can make a distinction in the use of the term disciples; in some places it is “his own disciples”, in other places it is “his disciples”. According to some scholars the expression “his disciples” without the adjective “own” is an extended term.

When we go through the Gospel text related to the appointment of the twelve, we can identify three purposes for the appointment.

3:14 - to be with him

3:14 - to send them out to proclaim the message

### 3:15 - to have authority to cast out demons

The first motive, “to be with Jesus,” prepares the disciple for the second motive, or for the action of Jesus “to send out to preach” and as a consequence of sending them out to preach, the third motive becomes a necessity “to have the authority over the demons” as the integral part of the preaching

Mission should be followed from a vision. Mission is the mission of the triune God. A disciple is called to be sent out with a mission. But before sending, a disciple must be available to be with Jesus to experience him personally. The disciples are to continue the preaching mission of Jesus. A disciple is sent for proclaiming the message. This message is the message of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the mission itself is the mission of the Holy Trinity. So to be with him is very necessary for understanding the message of Jesus Christ and to have a clear vision of the mission a disciple undertakes. To be available to Jesus and to experience the person of Jesus, one has to abandon totally all the professional and family relations. The call to discipleship is a call to enter into the kingdom of God. Attachment to the riches of the world may be a hindrance to accept this call wholeheartedly. We know the story of a rich man who wanted to follow Jesus. “When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving; for he had many possessions” (Mk 10: 22).

The second purpose, “to send out to proclaim the message”, should follow from the first purpose. “To be with Jesus” is an experience of joy. A disciple is called to experience the joy of being with Jesus. Union with the Holy Trinity realized by being with Jesus is the first step in discipleship. This union is possible only by following a contemplative method. When a disciple is in union with Holy Trinity, he is in a blissful state. This joy must be shared with others. The sharing of this experience of joy of the union with the Holy Trinity is the mission proper to a disciple of Jesus.

The third purpose is not separated from the second, but is joined to it as the continuation of it. As the first motive, to be with him, is the consequence of the disciple’s response to Jesus’ call, so also the third motive is the consequence of His sending them to preach. The performance of the miracles and especially the casting out of demons is a testimony for the arrival of the kingdom of God. To continue the same preaching of Jesus, the message of the kingdom of God, a disciple should be equipped with the power over Satan. Moreover the casting out of demons, points to the fact that the disciple is sent with authority of the master.



## Chapter Three

### Characteristic Features of the Disciples of Jesus

The manner in which Jesus selects his disciples stands in sharp contrast to the way in which individuals became the disciples of masters in the first century Palestine. The Jewish mode common at the time of Jesus was one in which a prospective student would choose a rabbi to study with and would become a disciple only after much training. Jesus however, takes the initiative and calls the first disciples to follow him. It is very clear from the first call story and also in 2:14 of the gospel of Mark.

The fishermen whom Jesus encountered as he made his way along the shore of the Sea of Galilee were not seeking to join him. In fact, they do not appear to have been seeking anything. When Jesus met them they were simply engaged in the tasks which were considered part of their occupations, casting or mending their fishing nets. After all, there is no indication that these fishermen had heard of Jesus' preaching or undergone any special training or instruction that would have prepared them for this call.

In the calling of Levi (2:13-17) we can also notice this special uniqueness of Jesus' discipleship in comparison to rabbinic discipleship of that time. Here also initiative has

come from Jesus. Levi is pictured as sitting at his tax office, apparently engaged in tasks which comprised his normal daily activities as a tax collector. There is no indication that the son of Alpheus had ever set eyes on Jesus before the moment recorded in Mark 2:14.

This initiative from the part of the Master is one of the fundamental characteristics of discipleship of Jesus. Call to discipleship is a divine gift. Discipleship always begins with Jesus looking at a person and calling him (Mk. 1:16, 2:14; 10:21). Unlike the traditional Jewish discipleship of first century Palestine, Jesus himself chooses his disciples. "You did not choose me but I choose you" (Jn. 15:16).

A second fundamental characteristic of Jesus' disciples is that, once they respond to Jesus call, they abandon everything they have. But in Judaism, it was not the practice. When a person becomes the disciple of a rabbi he does not leave anything though he attaches himself to his master. It is solely for the purpose of studying the Torah. Once the study is completed, the disciple will leave the master. So disciple usually doesn't abandon everything forever. But in the case of Jesus' disciple it is not the practice<sup>14</sup>.

In the Gospel scenes of calling of disciples we find that the response of men consisted of two actions. The first

action involves a definite break with their former occupation and family ties and prepares them for the second action, which is the most important and decisive, the unconditional following of Jesus. The second action, 'to follow Jesus', is not possible without the first action 'to give up everything'. In Mk. 8:34, we read "If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". This verse is a clear revelation of the true nature and meaning of Jesus' discipleship. It is not the private teaching directed to the inner circle of disciples alone, but directed to all who wish to follow Jesus. Mark reports that Jesus calls to himself, "the multitude and his disciples". Since they are mentioned separately Mark wants 'the disciples' to be understood not as a part of the 'multitude' but as a separate group, although they are originally chosen from the multitude.

According to Mark 8:39, the first requirement of Jesus' disciple is self-denial. Self-denial here means total mortification. In other words, he has to say 'no' to his own selfishness. Self-denial is opposite to self-assertion. It is important to note that he is not to deny something, but he is to deny or renounce himself.<sup>15</sup>

Along with self denial, Jesus' disciple has another requirement too. "Let him take up his cross". Cross-bearing is the positive action demanded after one has denied or said 'no' to himself. To 'take up his cross' means that a disciple

is a person who is going to be executed. Here we see the complete mortification.

In the life of a true disciple he/she would be ready to sacrifice everything for the sake Christ. A Christian disciple is the one who abandons his previous relationship and commitments and attaches himself exclusively to the person and mission of Jesus Christ and thereby shows the readiness to share in the very destiny of his Master.<sup>16</sup>

In the calling scenes, this total mortification is very clear. The fishermen leave their nets, their boat, their relatives, their family and their friends in order to follow Jesus (Mk 1:16-20). Levi leaves his office, gives up his job as tax collector and follows Jesus (Mk 2:13-14).

One of the fundamental characteristics of a disciple of Jesus is that there is never a prospect for them of becoming masters themselves. Theirs is life-long bond of discipleship.

In Judaism on the other hand a disciple could expect to become a "rabbi" himself, and if possible a better rabbi than his master, after the fixed period of training and instruction. But for the discipleship of Jesus there was no fixed period of training and instruction. There is only lifelong formation as disciples under Christ's leadership.

Moreover, Jesus Christ expressly forbids any expectation from the part of His disciples, to be called

“rabbi” or master. It is very clear from Mt. 23:8-10. Here we read “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one father - the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah”. (Mt. 23:8-10)

If anyone wants to be Jesus’ disciple, he should have a continuing relationship with Him, accepting His leadership and going behind him to wherever he goes, the most decisive action of a disciple of Jesus is to follow him. The decisive action that is taken in self-denial and cross bearing is to be manifested in a concrete way by following Jesus with sustained fidelity. It denotes that the following should be continuous and permanent.<sup>17</sup>

The central mission of a disciple is to be with his master. This is very clear from the Gospel scenes of calling of the disciples. Jesus called the twelve “to be with Him” (Mk 3:14). So the disciple has to stay with the Master till the end of his life. So a lifelong formation is one of the fundamental characteristics of the discipleship of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus himself gave the name ‘Apostle’ to the twelve. This is implied in Mark also. “In the traditional understanding ‘an apostle’ is a personal messenger or envoy, commissioned to transmit the message or otherwise carry out the instruction of the commissioning agent”.<sup>18</sup> So Christ’s disciple is an envoy

of Jesus' Gospel. Jesus had chosen the twelve "to be sent out to preach; the time has come for them to an active part in the ministry". So the service of the Gospel is one of the fundamental characteristics of the disciples of Jesus.

The disciples have to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in deeds. Jesus commissions the twelve two by two, to go out to preach and exorcise unclean spirits, just as Jesus had been doing. The obedience of these disciples is apparent as we soon discover that they did exactly as they had been told. "So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them". (Mk. 6:12-13).

The disciples brought Jesus' message to the people. It was not their opinions they brought to men, but it was God's truth. The man who would bring an effective message to others must first receive it from God. The message is the call for repentance. To repent means to change one's mind and then to fit one's mind and then to fit one's actions to this change.

The disciples left everything behind as Jesus "charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff" (Mk.6:8). This call for confidence, courage and perseverance invites one to repentance and faith. The disciples are being reminded of trusting and depending on God and not to seek security in themselves.

Christ's disciple is a servant of the Gospel. "A slave or a servant in the days of Jesus was a person who had lost everything in this world".<sup>19</sup> When a person becomes the disciple of Jesus, he is freed from his sins but he becomes slave of righteousness. So the fundamental call of a Christian disciple is to be the servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"To follow" Jesus is the decisive act in the discipleship of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, we see what it means to "follow Jesus". It is not only in the stories and the discipleship discourses but throughout the Gospel.<sup>20</sup> From the analysis of the Gospel of Mark we understand that prayer is an important element of discipleship, and "following" Jesus has radical implications for one's attitude toward possessions. At the end of the Gospel, we come to know that, one's understanding of discipleship and one's ability to follow as a disciple are directly dependent on one's understanding of Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

According to Mark, the nature of following Jesus becomes clear only in the light of the cross. According to the opinion of the majority of Biblical scholars, Mark tries to present a theology of the following of the cross through his Gospel. This is very clear from the first discipleship discourse which is given in 8:34-9:1. This section is one of the important places where the way of Jesus to the cross

and the way of discipleship are most clearly interwoven. The similarity between the destiny of Jesus and that of His disciples is seen clearly in these sections, just as it was in the call and commissioning stories. After speaking of his own impending suffering, death and resurrection (8:31), Jesus states that anyone who would follow him also must be ready to suffer and die. "At the same time He promises final salvation to those who take up their cross and follow him".<sup>22</sup> The ultimate goal of following Jesus, therefore, is to share in the glory of the coming Lord and the joys of the kingdom of God (Mk. 1: 47;10:15, 23, 24, 25).

Jesus addresses the multitude as well as his disciples when he states that anyone who wants to come after him must take up his cross and follow him..



## Chapter Four

### Etymological Analysis of the Term ‘Follow’

Jesus, the master calls his disciples ‘to follow’ him. The disciples are asked to imbibe their master’s life and to go after him. So the term ‘follow’ is so condensed that a challenge is put before the disciples. It is also a Markan terminological technique that the word ‘to follow’ is used to speak of discipleship.

Of all the terms that denote human response to Jesus’ call the most important is “to follow” (*akoloutheo*). Mark uses the term ‘*akoloutheo*’ more frequently than others and in most cases it refers to the following of the disciples after Jesus. He uses it frequently with the particular intention of showing the uniqueness of discipleship. The term ‘*akoloutheo*’ is used in 1:18, 2:14, 2:15, 6:1, 9:38, 10:28, 32, 52, 11:9, 14:54, 15:41. The word ‘*akoloutheo*’ literally means ‘to follow some one’ or to ‘go behind some one’.<sup>23</sup> Following Christ points to the intimate relation of the disciple to the Master, involving not only accompanying Jesus wherever He went, but leaving everything else to attach oneself exclusively to Him. The notion of “following” is not imitation so much as sharing the lot of the Master - poverty, self-denial, persecution, the cross. In this way it is a sharing also in His salvation becoming fit for God’s kingdom, enjoying the hundred fold, and having eternal life.

The demand 'to follow' in the sense of going behind Jesus does not simply mean a physical going after the earthly Jesus, but the acceptance of the gift of discipleship. By following one takes up the challenges and trials to be faced in his life which is a life in Christ. When one shows the courage to go behind Jesus, in other words, he is accepting the fellowship with Jesus' life in all its mysterious dimensions. Jesus, the Master goes ahead and shows the way and the disciples have to follow it faithfully and with endurance.

The term '*akoloutheo*' is used in two senses; one is in literal sense with a spatial meaning e.g. Mk 5:24. "And a great crowd followed him". Here the following is limited to going behind the earthly Jesus. These people do not follow Jesus into Jerusalem as his disciples. No personal commitment to Jesus on the part of the people or any particular call from Jesus is shown. The second sense of '*akoloutheo*' is a religious sense, which includes the personal commitment to Jesus which breaks off all other ties. Here one enters into discipleship and it calls him / her to share Jesus' life and destiny<sup>24</sup>.

Mark uses the peculiar word '*akoloutheo*' in reference to the calling of the first disciples (Mk-1: 16-20, 2: 14). It is used to express the response of the disciples to the divine call of Jesus Christ. The disciples immediately leave everything and followed him. Here '*akoloutheo*' is

used in both its literal and religious sense. The disciples walk behind the earthly Jesus and also at the same time they committed themselves unconditionally to the person of Jesus. Now their total submission is to the will of their master. They radically obey the call of Jesus. By following Jesus, the disciples are coming into a new way of life.

When we think of following in a general sense, we understand that following is an attempt to be part and parcel of some ideologies or a person. It is not mere imitation or acting out the words and deeds of a person. But it is an active participation or a dynamic imbibing of the disciplines and principles of the master or leader. A human being cannot blindly imitate or follow a person or an ideology for a long time. There will be many motivating factors behind one's attempt 'to follow'. There are mainly two forms of following on the basis of the aim looked forward to.

1. Following a person who is viewed as a master to be followed.
2. Following an ideology or a principle

It is reasonable and quite natural that a person can be fascinated by someone whom he wishes to follow. Both dead and living people are being followed and even worshipped. Caution must be there not to blindly imitate and obey whatever is being said by the master. When one

follows a master, there forms a peculiar bond between the one who follows and the master. This bond need not be permanent, it can also be temporal. It pertains to the human freedom that at any time one can join and leave from the group of followers who attempt to make their life like that of their master. There may not be any unique formation course for all followers. But usually there will be a radical and common life pattern and discipline for all followers. After attaining the motive or the aim of following, one can go away from the attempt. The motive makes and forms the life of a follower. One cannot be a part time follower because the aim overwhelms his whole life.<sup>25</sup> There is need for a commitment and an urge towards the motive are is aiming to achieve. One can follow a master for achieving his own goals and selfish interests. In such a case, the follower uses his master as a means to reach his selfish ends.

Following an ideology or principle is also very common, but it is different from trying to achieve an aim in one's life. The ideology or principle attracts or forms an inner urge in human beings to live in accordance with the principle. The initiation is from the part of the one following because he is the one who chooses the principle which are found fascinating for him. The ideology or principle is not imposed to him.<sup>26</sup> Out of his freedom and ambition to lead a good life one tries to follow the principles. Here the

follower is not asked to abandon anybody or anything but he has to avoid everything which is against the nature of the ideology which he follows. Care should be taken not to be so adamant and stark in achieving their goals. Because it may harm one's fellow beings since there is always a room for the danger of destructive fundamentalism.

## Chapter Five

# The Uniqueness of Following Jesus

We have seen the etymological analysis of the term ‘following’ and the implications of ‘following’ in a general sense. Now it is appropriate to highlight the basic, underlying distinction between following in a general sense and following of Christ in particular. This is only possible through an understanding of the theological meaning of the expression: ‘following’ as it is presented in the Holy Scripture, particularly in the Gospel of St. Mark.

In the Gospels we see Jesus calls men to “follow him”. We know that this following is the first and basic requirement of Jesus’ discipleship. But mere ‘following’ does not automatically make one a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means all those who followed Jesus were not his disciples. In Mark 5: 24 we read “a large crowd followed him”. In Mark 3:7, we read “Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him”. So the real following is something different. The calling of Jesus is surely an act of grace; similarly the real response to this call or real following is very surely a gift of grace given by Jesus on the very call itself. This is one of the most important aspects of following Jesus.

“In the history of humankind there are few men or women who have had more influence than Jesus”<sup>27</sup>. There were so many leaders in history, who had plenty of followers. But Jesus was unique in a unique degree. So there is surely uniqueness in following Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus is a topic of tremendous interest in itself. Any understanding of what discipleship involves many things. It takes its lead from the discipleship to which he actually called his followers during his life and ministry.

What was it that attracted people to Jesus? When we search the Gospels for an answer to this question, we understand that His talk of the kingdom was one of the most striking and consistent features of his preaching and it attracted many to him. Mark the Evangelist sums up Jesus’ Message in terms of “the Kingdom of God”<sup>28</sup>. Jesus’ audience, of course, would be familiar with the thought of God as king. But Jesus made the talk of the Kingdom a central feature of his message in a way that no one else had been doing. Jesus spoke of the Kingdom ‘at hand’ (Mk. 1:15) this is something very unique. Likewise the call of Jesus was not only serious, but urgent. “God’s kingdom has drawn near, God’s rule is at hand” (Mk. 1:15). This urgency and specialty in following Jesus is very clear from the analysis given below.

To one man Jesus said, “Follow me”, he responded, “Lord let me first go and bury my father”. But

Jesus told him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God”(Lk. 9:59). To bury one’s father was one of the most elementary duties of a son. In Jewish Custom it is one of the fundamental religious responsibilities. That means the offensive in Jesus’ reply would be difficult to match. From this we understand the urgency in following Jesus. There is no time for the would-be disciple even to say farewell to his family (Lk 9:60). This urgency is also seen in the exchange of the messages of the “Kingdom of God”. In Luke’s second version of the disciples’ commission, we read “greet no one on the road”. In the Jewish custom, there were some ceremonies related to greetings and it consumed some time. The messengers of the Kingdom do not have that time. Their response to the call is very urgent, so also the message they carry.<sup>29</sup>

Each disciple is in a journey. Each disciple is in the ‘Way’. In order to understand the meaning of this, we have to grasp the theology of the ‘way’ in the Gospel of St. Mark. The journey in the ‘way’ begins with the call; its meaning is made clear by its association with the predictions of both the passion and resurrection. The last prediction of the passion is introduced by the word, “Jesus was walking ahead of them” (Mk 10:32). This verse is very important to understand the meaning of Christ’s discipleship. We will analyse this particular verse later.



At the tomb, the young man says to the women, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him, just as he told you" (Mk. 16:7) Jesus is walking ahead of the disciples in the way. Jesus is the model. Moreover Jesus is the way. So discipleship of Jesus is following Jesus in His way of Salvation<sup>30</sup>.

Now, we get a clearer idea of the uniqueness of following Jesus. Christ's disciple must follow Jesus to the cross, and then onward into Galilee. In the Gospel of St. Mark Galilee is not just a place. We can see this very clearly if we understand that the geographical journey which Mark constructs and which Jesus reveals to the disciples the meaning of discipleship is a journey to Jerusalem; right from the north they came down through Galilee and Judea to Jerusalem; there the first part of the journey ends; but it recommences and goes back to Galilee, to the place where Jesus had taught, healed and preached.

In the Gospel of St. Mark there is a sharp division between Galilee and Jerusalem; the former is the place of mission, the latter the place of death<sup>31</sup>. In the original manuscript of the Gospel of St. Mark, there is no report of the resurrection appearances. It is not that the end part of the Gospel was torn off from the original copy of the Gospel and lost forever. But the meaning is that Jesus, the Risen Lord is always present with his disciples, he is going ahead

of them as they go on the mission to which he has called them. And now the end meets the beginning, the beginning of discipleship was the call and commission to go and fish for men; the end is its fulfillment, and the disciples go off on this mission. But they do not go alone; they go with Jesus at the head. Whether it is to persecution, or to service, to rejection or to success, 'follow me' is the call. That means Christ's disciple must follow Jesus to the cross or in self-denial or in humility and follow Him to win the gentiles for and with their Master. The uniqueness of Jesus' discipleship and following of Jesus is that the Risen Lord goes ahead of those who follow Him. The eyes of those who follow Him are not to be on the end, nor even on the way itself, but on the leader, he who has gone to the cross but has gone through it back to be their leader<sup>32</sup>.

After the detailed analyze of the unique implications of following, we encounter a very important and difficult question, "How one can follow Jesus"? In the Gospel of St. Mark we see three essential requirements of discipleship. They are (1) "let him deny himself", (2) "take up his Cross' and (3)"follow me". Our attention is in the third requirement that is to "follow me". But in order to follow Jesus, first of all we have to fulfill the first two requirements. Hence the first two requirements of Jesus' discipleship become the two requirements of the fulfillment of the third requirement. The first requirement is self-denial .

“*Aparnesasthoheauton*” is the Greek equivalent to the phrase ‘let him deny himself’. But this original Greek phrase is one of the most difficult expressions in the whole Gospel of Mark to translate adequately. It has been variously translated.<sup>33</sup> He must forget himself,” he must leave self behind”, “let him renounce himself”. The phrase also means, “he must give up all claims of himself.”

The term *aparnesmai* is an intensive form of ‘*arneomai*’ and both the forms mean ‘to say no’. The term ‘*aparneomai*’ appears only once in the Septuagint and that is in Is 31:7. (“for on that day all of you shall throw away your idols of silver and idols of gold”), here it stands for the Hebrew verb ‘*maas*’ which means ‘to reject, ‘to retire’, to despise’.

In the Gospel of St. Mark, the word ‘*aparneomai*’ occurs four times (8:34, 14:30, 31, 72). With the exception of 8:34, all the other occurrences are in the passion narrative where it is used with reference to Peter’s denial of Jesus. It is used in Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial (14:30) and in Peter’s assurance of fidelity (14:31). In the actual description of Peter’s denial both ‘*arneomai*’ and ‘*aparaneoma*’ are used. In all these occurrences ‘*arneomai*’ or ‘*aparcleonai*’ means the same. “To disavow any connection with”. This meaning is clear from the account of the denial. The maiden at the courtyard of high priest said “You too were with Jesus of Nazareth”. But Peter

“denied” it. Here the denial of Peter means Peter denied his connection with Jesus.

Against this background of Peter’s denial of Jesus, the meaning of the term ‘*aparneomai*’ of 8:34 becomes clear. Self denial is the opposite to self-assertion, it is to surrender oneself, it is to risk one’s own life. It is important to note that in the phrase “*aparnesastho hearten*’, it is the person himself that is made the direct object of the action of the verb<sup>34</sup>. This means that he is not to deny something to self, but he is to deny or renounce himself. Here self-denial has nothing to do with accretions or self discipline; however, practical and ethical implications are not excluded here.

Self denial means to say no to oneself, to disown any claim on oneself’ not to make his own interests and desires the supreme concern of his life. Self denial is inevitable in following Jesus.

The second requirement is cross bearing. It is very surely an inevitable factor in discipleship. Cross -bearing is followed by denying one’s own self. Taking up the cross is a positive action. “Let him take up his cross” “*arato ton Staurov autou*”. (Mk 8/34). It clearly refers to the cross of the disciples. The phrase ‘to take up one’s cross’ means to lift up one’s cross - beam and walk behind Jesus to the place of execution. This indicates either an actual martyrdom or a potential martyrdom.

Even though the figure of carrying one's own cross is not found either in the O.T. or in the Rabbinic literature, the sight of a condemned person carrying his cross beam to the place of execution was familiar enough in Roman Palestine. This sight to enable Jesus to use this figure before his hearers. To 'take up his cross' here meant that such a one was going to die. The figure is stark and extreme and Jesus might have meant nothing less than this<sup>35</sup>.

Even though Mark's community was subject to persecution, all those who confessed Christ did not end their lives on the cross; many were burnt to death and beheaded during Nero's persecution. Hence the phrase 'to take up one's cross' is at least partly metaphorical, indicating death only in general terms and not indicating its exact nature and manner. Cross bearing is understood in different senses. It implies 'preparedness to die', 'readiness for martyrdom' and also the willingness to make any sacrifice, even life itself. Self denial is the inner attitude; cross bearing is the outward activity which should accompany the inner attitude. H.B. Sweet understands the phrase 'to take up one's cross' as to put oneself into the position of a condemned man on his way to execution, is to be prepared to face extreme forms of shame and loss<sup>36</sup>. Mostly the phrase is understood in a moral sense. Then the interpretation will be to take upon oneself the reality of suffering and sacrifice or taking on one's shoulders a task,

or accepting a duty which makes life, an agony. But this is not in correspondence with the Gospel notion of Cross bearing. The verses that immediately follow the saying on cross bearing (Mk 8/35- 38) do not allow such an interpretation at all. Jesus' saying on cross bearing should be understood metaphorically, that is, in the sense of a readiness for martyrdom which is to be actualized in the self denial that might involve the total surrender of life itself.<sup>37</sup>

If a person is able to fulfill these two requirements, he is in a potential to follow Jesus. Following Jesus is the most decisive act. The first two requirements prepare the way for the third act. Jesus is going ahead of us. The way leads to passion, death, resurrection and finally to mission. One could follow Jesus Christ only by fulfilling all these requirements.

## Chapter Six

### Following Jesus; an invitation to Glorification through Passion

Discipleship is the central theme of the Gospel of St. Mark. This is very clear from a detailed analysis of the nature and purpose of the Gospel. From a deeper study of the Gospel we come to know that the Gospel of is nothing other than a passion narrative with a long introduction. Compared with other synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St. John, the Gospel of St. Mark gives prominence to the passion, rejection, cross and death of Jesus Christ. This Gospel tries to project the themes of suffering, cross bearing and persecution as great values of Christian life. The reason for this emphasis can only be seen in connection with the central theme of this Gospel, namely, the discipleship. This Gospel presents persecution as the reward for discipleship.

Christ's disciples are those who respond positively to the invitation of Jesus Christ to follow him and those who are able to follow him in reality. In Mark the term "to follow" is used predominantly to denote discipleship. From the analysis of the Gospel scenes of the calling of the disciples we know that the initiative to discipleship is from the part of the master and the response of those who follow him were so immediate and unreflective. Following an ideal person or following an attractive ideology is something

common in human beings. But following Christ is something fundamentally different and even the very decisive act of following itself is unique. This can only be explained by a systematic understanding of the theology of following and how it is articulated in the Gospel of St. Mark.

We can take three important verses of this Gospel for an analysis. They are “Jesus said to them, follow me” (Mk. 1:17); “they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead of them” (Mk.10:32) and “he is going ahead of you to Galilee, and there you will see him” (Mk.16:7). These three verses are related with three important instances in the life of Jesus and his disciples. In the first instance disciples were invited to follow Jesus Christ. Those who responded positively to the call of Jesus followed him. Then they became witnesses of the life giving words and mighty deeds of the Kingdom of God. The disciples were learning from Jesus Christ, their eternal Master. In the second instance Jesus and his disciples were going to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place of suffering, cross and death. At the same time Jerusalem is the place of glory. Disciples are going to face the realities of suffering, passion and persecution. But they are not going alone. Jesus is going before them. Disciples are only asked to follow Jesus, who is going ahead of them.

The last instance is related to the resurrection of Jesus. The young man sitting in the empty tomb told that Jesus is going ahead of the disciples to Galilee. Disciples



were asked to follow Jesus to Galilee. Galilee is the place of mission. So Jesus is always and eternally present before the disciples. He is always going ahead of his disciples. Those who are following him are his true disciples. Christ's discipleship is not merely studying something from Jesus Christ; Christ's discipleship is not merely the imitation of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Christ's discipleship is following Jesus Christ.

Before inviting the disciples to follow him, Jesus sees them (Mk. 1:16, 19; 2:14). This seeing is very important. Jesus sees the inside of the disciples. Jesus sees in them something which others are not able to see in them. This is the mysterious aspect in every call to discipleship. In the last part of the Gospel, that is in Mk. 16:7 we read "in Galilee disciples will see Jesus". So the evangelist is making an inclusion between Mk. 1:16 and Mk.16:7.

Firstly Jesus sees the disciples. If the disciples want to see Jesus, they have to follow Jesus in his suffering, cross, rejection by others, persecution, death, glory and follow him in mission work. Galilee is the place of mission. If one person is able to follow Jesus in all these realities he/she is able to see Jesus. This is Christ's discipleship. So we can very surely say that Christ's disciple is one who follows Christ.

## Chapter Seven

### Being a Disciple is a Mission of Being Human

#### Practical aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ

Jesus called the twelve to be with him. (Mk: 3:14) The central mission of Jesus' disciple is to be with his master. This is the idea we get when we come across the gospel scenes of calling the disciples. But the life of Jesus brings light upon the fact of being with the others. Any academic theologization of discipleship without practicing is utterly meaningless. It is true that a disciple as the follower of Jesus who dedicated his whole life for the entire humanity can't be confined to merely the divine realm rather a disciple is obliged to be a refuge of all those who undergo injustice, oppressions, exploitations...etc. It is necessary to have a clear vision of the elevated status of human being in the world to make one's discipleship more human in the present world.

Every human being is mysterious and to a large extent unknowable. We know that no one will know our secret unless we consent to reveal it to others. If they are to tread our mind we must lift the veil. We shall do so if we wish; we should not do unless we desire to do so. This mysterious aspect of human being itself shows man's elevated status.

God is the centre of human existence. Therefore, man is considered not alone but in his relation with God. Man was created by God in His image and likeness. (Gen: 1:26-27) Therefore, the ultimate dignity and destiny of man is to return to his Maker. God actualizes in man the ability which He himself has implanted in the human spirit to reach out after God, to ask about him, and to return to him. Man's orientation towards the absolute in his total freedom and choice renders him to an elevated position. Jesus Christ is the one, who has uniquely joined human and divine in himself and in doing so he showed that what human truly is. Jesus was walking around Jerusalem comforting and consoling others. Therefore a disciple can't be isolated from the world and the fellow beings. To be a disciple of Christ means to be with the people by orienting oneself and others to God.

God created man because he wanted to share himself with us. Therefore everyone created by God enjoys an elevated status in the world. Man is always in the world but already beyond it that is, he is on the way back to his absolute ground which lies beyond the boundaries of the world. Through Jesus Christ God invites every human to elevate himself to divine realm. God is the horizon of human life. All human endeavors and possibilities are actualized by God. God bestows grace on human beings to reach himself in and through Christ.

God is love, who always receives human beings to the most intimate communion with himself in love, this has become manifest in the sending and incarnation and in the cross. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn. 3,16). Love is a divine gift which brings a person face to face with God. God is love (1Jn. 4:16), therefore one who is created by God shares the essence of God. The infinite emptiness which lies at the innermost center of every man cries out to be fulfilled with the infinite fullness of God. It is a great desire of every man to have a loving personal union with God and the creatures. God is one who renders human beings intelligible and lovable. In genuinely opening oneself in love for God, man receives the possibility of going forth from themselves, coming out of themselves. To enter into a personal relationship of community and reciprocal love means to reach the divine realm. Therefore when a person loves another with a pure, unselfish, unconditional heart and one experiences the proximity of God, because love is directed toward God Himself. The more one loves, the more one goes beyond the ordinary realm because love is something divine.

All the facts mentioned above proves that man is represented as a being without equal in this world. Man's position as free being having special significance and value for God his capacity to go beyond the absolute; his capacity to become partner with God in genuine dialogue which

leads to absolute intimacy; his capacity to partake in the divine nature, his capacity to love God and fellow beings/ these are the things which really make man a unique being who is not merely a part of the greater whole (world). The history of man is not an element in the all embracing cosmogony, rather the end of the universe is determined by man's history in the eyes of God.

From the ideas mentioned above, it is easy to understand that man has an elevated status in the world but the things above mentioned contradict the present world scenario. Moreover the present situation of humanity compels us to ask certain questions such as Does humanity enjoy such an elevated position? Do we respect the human dignity? Are we mindful of our fellow beings, the poor, and the abandoned?

The developed world is marked by consumerism which values a person for what they produce or possess and defines relations in terms of personal gains. Every day the cry of justice comes from those being harassed, exiled, imprisoned, tortured and even killed. The cries of the victims are heard across the globe. The idea of elevated position of humanity helps a disciple to grow in the awareness of the necessity of being human. This awareness of dignity has to become the deepest motive of one's discipleship. It is nothing but the awareness of God's

indwelling presence in oneself and in the life of the fellow beings. A disciple who is aware of the elevated status of human beings deepens his relationship with the fellow beings. The idea of elevated position of man not only makes a disciple conscious of the dignity and value of human person but also leads him to commit himself to redress effectively the injustices that deny human dignity.

In the present scenario we are experiencing enormous changes to the extent that they create threat to humanity. The existential situation of humanity is darkened. Without being respectful to the human dignity, all human achievements though impressive surely, end up as instrument of domination and subjugation. The most challenging issue is lack of human solidarity. Therefore, we need to have an attitude of reverence to each and every person. That will create a more human and just world and society.

A disciple is called to hold the world in an embrace of love. He should aim at building a new society in which every man in all ages should find their own completeness in a higher order of living or in an elevated position. Human dignity is the term often cited today and sometimes passionately affirmed. But it is a notorious fact that human dignity is not always pursued most earnestly by the people who talk about it most loudly. The existing world order or

disorder is quite contrary to the divine will of God. The world system seems to be greedy, exploitative, racist and in tragic injustice. The life of Jesus Christ persuades a disciple to turn towards his fellow beings with great reverence.

The story of Jesus is that of a life given for others. We may see many people being caught in the bondage of sexual abuse, social injustice, oppression, racial discrimination, religious fundamentalism and the many forms of the occult religion. They need someone to bring the light into their lives. Therefore the duty of a Jesus' disciple is to respect the human dignity and to give helping hands to each and everyone. Reverence is the only appropriate attitude towards human dignity ultimately guaranteed by God. Thus reverence will resist all the actions which violate man, make inconsiderate use of man or debase him merely as a means of achieving objective goals.

Human dignity takes irreducible relevance from the humanity of Jesus Christ. If there is anything distinctive and specific about Christian discipleship, it is only because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The story of Jesus' life is a story of a life given to others. Therefore a disciple must gradually mature into the love in which he can completely lose himself in God for the entire humanity. It is only in the existential selfless giving that we will be

free to serve the world. Being lost for oneself, we can stir others to that love which distinguishes the kingdom of God from every other communal utopia. Man's elevated position reminds a disciple of his or her responsibility to become the promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation in order to build a more and more just and fraternal society. Therefore as the recipient of a mission mandate of Jesus Christ, the duty of a disciple is nothing but to be the benediction of the entire humanity.

In this sense discipleship is a call to live for God and for the fellow beings. Jesus Christ is the exemplar of the actualization of the real life and love.

“One asked Jesus Christ,  
Oh! Jesus how much you love me,  
He stretched out his hands and died”

Therefore, a sincere discipleship demands a total self denial for God and the fellow beings. Jesus is the one who raises and opens our hearts. He has shown the way of life which ultimately reaches the divine realm. Jesus is a human person as we are human persons, but what makes him unique is his attitude towards God and His people. Likewise what makes Christian discipleship unique is its relationship to Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of what all his disciples want to be and the fellow beings. Jesus



reveals to his disciples what they are called to be and what their highest goal is. Thus he remains as the revelation of what a disciple really is. He teaches what God wants from a disciple.

Jesus' life inspires a disciple to be in union with God and in loving relationship with all people. He teaches his disciples that God is compassionate and merciful and puts them into a relationship of love with God and the people. A disciple should be sensitive to the ill, the needs and service of the people who stretch out the hand to him and ask for his compassion and assistance. The disciple should concretely and existentially apply the theological truths and spiritual charism in practical life. He is to be animated by the true missionary spirit which looks beyond the boundaries of customs, rite, and country to meet the needs of the whole humanity.

Jesus expresses the warmth of his humanness by spending time people with the needy who throng and with his friends. His ability to touch their hearts and mind was extraordinary. He had compassion for all those who were small, condemned, oppressed or repressed. His heart melted at the sight of the people who were crushed by the unjust power and exploitation. The mercy Jesus proposes to his disciple is not mere compassion or sympathy rather it demands an efficacious involvement with his fellow

beings. The existing world is quite contrary to the Christian values. The world system is greedy explorative, racist, selfish and tragic injustice. Even in the midst of all these problems a disciple has to uphold love and justice.

Traditional theology has made sacred the way of following Christ and emphasized the aspects of being set apart. For example in India too, many people see the priests as sacred persons set apart from the world. Of course, priest is a sacred person, but only in relation with Christ who was among the people in close contact with the last and least. Whenever there is one sobbing for food, Jesus is suffering. It is so easy to calm ourselves with the thought that the starving will one day be depleted at the heavenly banquet. It is estimated, conservatively, that at least 25 million people die of starvation. How can we teach someone who is starving, to pray "Our Father..... give us this day our daily bread?" We must return to the Eucharist. Christ so loves us that he wants to feed us with his body and blood. Jesus is hungry in all those who are hungry. Christ has told us that the form of social enquiry. "I was hungry, you gave me no food to eat, I was thirsty you gave me nothing to drink."

In the context of oppression, poverty and all the inhuman conditions, a disciple has to be a courageous leader with a heart involving in the struggle of oppression and sharing their sorrow. All most every people around us

experience tensions, depressions, sadness, sufferings etc. A disciple has responsibility to hear the lamentations of the people around him. He must give a healing touch amidst of their failures, disappointment, sorrows and frustration. The Eucharist reminds his disciples of Christ's passion and death and inspires them to cast their care of the broken heart. The deep pain of one's life may be healed by their single word. So the duty of a disciple is to demolish the barricade of selfishness for being a refuge for others.

The fact of being enimical makes people uncivilized. The absence of peace brings about the wars and all other moral deterioration. Hence a disciple is called to be a prophet of peace. The sign of peace indicates one's desire to be in union and harmony with all our brothers and sisters. Moreover the sign of peace signifies one's readiness and willingness to be at peace with everyone. It is also a sign of readiness to forgive unconditionally. It is possible for one to live with the raging resentment, but the more the one keeps raging resentment, the more one moves far away from the real meaning of discipleship.

Discipleship is a sacrifice which reminds of the boundless love of Jesus Christ. Therefore the Christian discipleship persuades one to be a witness to the relentless love of Jesus Christ in the world. One's duty is to hold the world in an embrace of love. Without being confined to

merely ritual practices one is to go out to the world to let the people partake of Christ's everlasting love.

Like Jesus, a disciple is a prophetic leader who incarnates God's message in his personality. In a society where injustice, discrimination and exploitation are the order of the day, one must speak out with courage and fortitude, openly leading people to reject destructive patterns of thought and behavior that discriminate and exploit the poor. The scandalous social division based on exploitation calls a disciple to a preferential commitment to establish justice and to be with the victim of injustice for the sake of their empowerment and liberation.

Jesus reminds us of the necessity of total self giving. His inviting phrase 'follow me' brings the disciples towards a great task. His invitation is for nothing but to be a sacrifice, a self sacrifice. The Eucharist shows us the true love and self sacrifice of Jesus. Christ's whole body was broken in his death. So the Whole life of a disciple is also a sacrificial offering. The death was not one which came to him unexpectedly and against his will. But rather, he was going to it quite deliberately. He wanted it to be an act of worship of God, a real sacrifice. Christ denied himself for the salvation of the whole humanity. It is very painful to deny oneself but this is what Jesus Christ wants to come forth from his disciples.

In these tribulant times, we repeatedly lose sight of what really makes life worth living. We think that presence of this or that person makes sense for us to live. But the truth is that our life gets meaning through Jesus Christ. A disciple has a share in the life of Christ. The real story of the life of Jesus Christ is that of a life given for others. His life was for many. He says "This is my blood which is poured out for many" (MK 14, 24). Christ's life reminds us of the necessity of being for others. Therefore a disciple should not look on his life in isolation from the life of others. A real discipleship demands a personal relationship with God and the fellow beings.

If a disciple is shrinking into oneself narrowing the lines of communion instead of being for others he is against the Christian values. The fact of being far away from our fellow beings makes one distanced from the real meaning and purpose of discipleship. Therefore as a disciple of Jesus Christ one's duty is nothing but self denying in order to be at the service of others. The person who is willing to do this is passing from self-centeredness to self denial. Discipleship is essentially deepening one's personal relationship with God which presupposes faith and love with the fellow beings.

A disciple partakes of the life and spirit of Jesus. He is called to project Jesus' image and manifest his

compassion. Like Jesus Christ whom he officially represents, a disciple is called not to be served but to serve in God's name. A disciple stands as the model for the people who seek the presence of God. Jesus' inviting phrase "follow me" indicates that the disciples are set apart in a certain sense. But it doesn't mean that they are made distant from the people, rather they are totally dedicated for the service of others. We can say every man receives this vocation that is, to respect the dignity and dedicate for the service of others. A sincere discipleship demands total self-surrender to God and the people. A disciple should be sensitive to the ill, the needs and suffering of the people who stretch out their hands to him and ask for his compassion and assistance. Hence a disciple doesn't exist for himself; he has a function which directs his whole life, speech, action, and suffering to other human beings. He is appointed on behalf of men; his being is dedicated to the service of others.

As we have discussed human being created in the image and likeness of God has a special dignity and an elevated status in the world. Moreover as Christ has a sanctified humanity through his paschal mysteries, no human being should be deprived of his or her elevated status by any reason- poverty, injustice, oppressions, exploitation, religious fundamentalism etc. A disciple as the follower

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and representative of Christ is supposed to keep one's dignity and respect the dignity of others. Hence being more human and helping others to live in a human status is the real task of a disciple. A disciple has the duty to be the light to the entire humanity. To be the light means to give out oneself and illumine oneself for others so that everyone could enjoy the real status- elevated status- in the world. Let all the followers of Jesus Christ bear in their heart that 'Being human is better than giving a lot of message'. Therefore a disciple as the follower of the foot prints of Jesus Christ doesn't need to say much, but let his life be a good message to the world.

## Chapter Eight

### **Holy Eucharist, a Gift Par Excellence for the follower of Jesus Christ**

Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church. It is a mystery and it cannot be unveiled fully because it is incomprehensible for the limited human intellect. The Holy Eucharist is the profound sacrament of the church, the profound expression of God's love for his people. In this sacrament we have the ultimate expression of the mutual love between God and Man. "The Eucharist is God's great gift of his love and concern for us"<sup>38</sup> It is the Eucharist which is the heart of the mystical body.

Eucharist, the infinite gift, the most perfect of all possible gifts, comes to us in the most humble way possible. Through the action of the priest, simple unleavened bread and simple vine, became the body and the blood of Christ. Eucharist is the most astonishing gift of Jesus himself as our most precious of all possible foods. He has given us the ultimate gift of his love. There is nothing else in all of creation that can compare with this gift. It is divinely unique. Eucharist is the gift of God par excellence for one who follows Jesus.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change, neither shadow of change (James 1:17). God is



the one who takes the initiative for creation and who gives nourishment and life (Ps 104). It is God who takes the initiative for salvation. The primary attitude required of man is to open himself to the gift of God. When he receives the gift he becomes capable of a genuine generosity and is called to practice giving himself in his turn. (1Jn 3:6)<sup>39</sup> As is the eucharist we can say discipleship itself is a gift that demands from man to be open and commit himself in following Jesus the ultimate gift from God for the whole humanity.

The theme of giving is a strong idea in the scripture. The word 'give', 'giving', 'gift' and other such words occur at least 2100 times. The OT is not a time of gifts but rather of promise. The gifts themselves function only to prefigure and prepare for the definitive gift<sup>40</sup> The very first occurrence is in connection with the giving of light. God placed the great lights in the heavens "to give light upon the earth" (Gen 1:15). God himself is the light given to the world (Gen 1:3, 1Jn 1:5, Rev 22:5). God said to Abraham "I will give you this land also to your posterity" (Gen 15:18). The Promised Land was a gift of God to the people. Another gift which God gave to his people through Moses is law (Dt. 5:22) the gift beyond all others, for it is a participation in his own wisdom. During their journey towards Promised Land they received several gifts from God. They received 'Manna' as a special gift in the wilderness.

In the OT the emphasis is on God's material blessings rather than spiritual blessings: "That every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God" (Eccle 3:13). In the OT abilities and possessions are gift of God's grace.

In the New Testament spiritual blessings are more important. In the New Testament two Greek words are used for gift of God: 1) '*dorea*' which means free will gift. 2) '*charisma*' which means gracious gift. But the meaning of the two terms are similar.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Gift of God in Jesus**

The father reveals his love for us, by giving us, His own son (Jn 3:16). Through Jesus Christ, Father gave Himself to the world, for Jesus is filled with all the riches of the Father (Jn1:4). Jesus gave Himself to the one who follows Him, for his/her salvation and for salvation of all mankind. So Jesus is the special gift of God to the world. In this sense Jesus can be called as 'the gift' or gift par excellence for the one who follows Him. The presence of Jesus Christ is actualized through Holy Eucharist.

Eucharist is the special gift of Jesus to the one who follows Jesus. He gives "His flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:32,51). In Lk 22:19 Jesus says "this is my body given for you". So Eucharist is the gift of God.<sup>42</sup> 'Given for you'

refers primarily to the disciples of Jesus. So we can say that Holy Eucharist is a gift for Jesus' discipleship.

Every gift God gives is an invitation to an encounter with God. When one gives a gift we have to show our love and respect to him. So there is reciprocity. The sacrifice of Christ is the perfect gift of God to the mankind. Hereafter there is no need for man to offer other gifts. The perfect victim is eternally sufficient (Heb 7:27). But from the part of man he should join himself to this victim by offering himself to God. Eucharist is the gift of God and also it is an invitation to an encounter with God. God gives the gift to show his glory and to share his love. A disciple is one who is called to share the glory and joy of Christ. So encountering God in eucharist is very necessary in the life of disciple.<sup>43</sup>

When we analyse OT we understand that manna is a food miraculously sent to the Israelites during their forty years of sojourn in the desert (Ex. 16; Numb 11:6-9). These grains are described as resembling coriander seed and bdellium, with a taste like 'flour with honey', or "bread tempered with oil" (Exo. 16:31, Num 11:7-8). The Israelites were instructed to eat only the manna they had gathered for each day. The manna fell for the first time while the Israelites were in the desert of sin, six weeks after their departure from Egypt, in answer to their murmurs over the tribulations of desert life.<sup>44</sup> The manna to be collected was

limited to a gomor per person; but on the eve of Sabbath a double portion was gathered. As a reminder to the future generations, a vessel filled with manna was placed near the Ark of the Covenant. The name of manna is connected with the exclamation “*Man hu*”, which the Israelites uttered on first seeing it. Septuagint translates this word as “What is this.”<sup>45</sup>

According to the Bible, Manna is from heaven. In the ‘Mishnah’, manna is treated as a supernatural substance, created during the twilight of the 6th day of creation. According to the classical rabbinical literature, manna was ground in a heavenly mill for the use of the righteous. The miracle of giving manna was an invitation to realize the providence and care of God towards his people. So it was a special moment of encounter with God. Materially speaking manna is a food given to the people of Israel but in the spiritual sense ‘manna’ is the prefiguration of some special gift which will be given to the people later. This will be discussed later in connection with the NT.<sup>46</sup>

## **The Salvific Dimension of Manna as a Gift**

Apart from the obvious purpose of the ‘manna’ to feed the people there are some salvific dimension to it. “The gift of ‘manna’ also taught “*Kavod Adoshem*”, the infinitive power and the glory of God. It is a free gift of God, a gift which was due and sufficient to each law-abiding person. If they follow the law, they would miraculously find

themselves at the right place at the right time to ensure their survival against all troubles.<sup>47</sup>

\* Through this gift God showed Himself as a God who is capable of providing precisely what was required to fulfill their daily needs. It revealed certain lessons about their own deliverance in the unseen future.<sup>48</sup>

\* The manna was given upto the sixth day; there was no manna on the seventh day. It demonstrates that God not only had the power to start creation, but to stop it as well. Sabbath is introduced to the people. Seventh day is not a burden but a gift from the creator. On the seventh day they should rely on God.<sup>49</sup>

\* Storage of manna was a reminder to the Israelites that they are given their daily ration not only for their survival but also to fulfill the objectives of God. Our possessions are means not for our individual gratification but to fulfill the mission as a 'Mamlechet Kohanim' (nation of priests) and a 'goy kadosh' (holy nation)<sup>50</sup>

\* In giving Israel this means of subsistence, God, in effect indicated to them His efficacious presence. For this purpose God asked them to preserve a vessel of manna along with the tablets of law.<sup>51</sup>

\* Israelites were allowed to collect the manna day after day without saving any for the next day. Thus the manna

was for the people the way of showing their obedience to God and their confidence in His Word.<sup>52</sup>

\* The cakes of boiled ‘manna’ were tasteless. Israelites complained of it without realizing its lesson and salvific dimension. Instead of relying only on earthly food man should first of all trust what comes from heaven, the mysterious food of which Manna is the symbol of the word of God (Due 8:3)<sup>53</sup>

\* Manna has an eschatological dimension. Israel, when thinking over its past in prayer before God they always sang of the favor shown through the manna “wheat and bread from heaven”, “the bread of the strong”, “the bread of angels in heaven” (Ps 78:23f, 105:40)<sup>54</sup> In praising this gift of manna they imagined the heavenly nourishment which God will give to his children at the time of eschatological banquet (Wis. 16:20f). The book of revelation speaks of manna as the food given to the one who fulfills his mission in earthly life successfully. (Rev 2:17)<sup>55</sup>

\* Manna is considered as the prefiguration of the Eucharist. In the gospel of St. John chapter six, verses 32 and following Jesus says “very truly I tell you it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven but it is my Father who gives you true bread from heaven”.

God is the giver of all gifts and he takes the initiative for man’s salvation. In Old Testament the idea of gift of

God is related to material blessings but in the New Testament gift of God is spiritual than material. Jesus Christ is the gift of God Par excellence. Every gift of God is an invitation to an encounter with God. Manna is a gift and more than a material food it has a salvific dimension.

### **Eucharist: Gift to the Bride by the Bridegroom**

The interdependence of Jesus and the followers is the core of another analogy taken from familial relationships, the Church as the Bride of Christ. Jesus is presented as the bridegroom. The bride belongs to him (Jn 3:29). His coming is symbolized as a wedding feast (Mt 22:10). His disciples are His friends (Mt 9:15). The faithful obedience of His church is viewed as preparation for the marriage (Rev 19: 7,9). And the heartfelt worship of God's faithful is aptly summarized by the prayer of the bride 'maranata'. Paul speaks of having betrothed the Corinthian Church to Christ, as a pure bride, and of this bride as having been deceived by the serpent, like Eve, when she preferred a different Gospel (Cori 11 :2-4)<sup>57</sup>

In Ephesians 5: 22ff the relation between church and Christ is depicted as the relation between husband and wife. In v. 29 it is written that Christ nourishes and tenderly cares for it. Christ nourishes the church with his body and blood. In the marriage ceremony of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church it is said that Christ offered his body and blood as the ring of betrothal to the church.<sup>58</sup> Through the sacrament of Eucharist Jesus draws the faithful into his

hour. In the Eucharist he shows us the bond that he willed to establish between him and the church. In the sacrifice on the cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as his Bride and body. Eve came forth from the side of Adam as he slept and the new Eve, the church, came forth from the open side of Christ sleeping in death, from the pierced side of Christ. St. John says in his Gospel that water and blood came forth from the pierced side of Jesus Christ (Jn 19: 34). These are the symbols of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.<sup>59</sup>

According to the Gospel of John there are three fruits of the Eucharist:

a) Life eternal (6: 51, 53, 54, 57)

b) Resurrection: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day” (6; 54)

c) Communion: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them” (Jn 6: 56)<sup>60</sup> Each celebration of the Eucharist makes the gift sacramentally present which the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. Eucharist is the bread broken for all. “Church draws her life from the Eucharist. The church in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened.”<sup>61</sup> Eucharist is the source of every grace and it contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, Eucharist is Christ himself, our living bread. Through his own flesh



and through the life giving Holy Spirit he offers life to men.<sup>62</sup>

We all know that humanity itself is the gift of God and everything in this universe. When we search the deeper meaning of gift we can easily understand that God is the ultimate giver and his gift is the perfect gift. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). So what we receive in Jesus Christ is the perfect gift, i.e. Emmanuel, God is with us, which we experience through the breaking of the bread eternal. Jesus as the most precious and perfect gift God can give us the most precious and Eucharist. It is "the bread of eternal life." It is the gift which can be given by the son of God for his bride, the church.

Christ uses the manna as the type and symbol of the Eucharistic food, which is true "bread from heaven", and "bread of life", i.e., life-giving bread, in a far higher sense than the manna of old testament (John 6). St. Paul in calling the manna "spiritual food" (1 Corinthians 10:3), alludes to its symbolical significance with regard to the Eucharist as much as to its miraculous character. Hence the manna has always been a common Eucharistic symbol in Christian art and liturgy. In Apocalypse 2:17, the manna stands as the symbol of the happiness of heaven.

## **Eucharist as a Means of Redemption for the Follower of Jesus**

The bread of life has the power to draw out us from the captivity of evil power. “The Eucharist redeems and sanctifies our daily existence.”<sup>63</sup> It helps us to change our self. Our goal in life is to convert our life at every moment into a loving response, as we continually experience in deepening consciousness the infinite love of God for us. Through the Eucharist God’s choicest and most perfect gift of loving presence is given to us. So that we have to respond to this eternal love by submitting our self for a change. To give, not things, but ultimately oneself, is the essence of love, which God has showed us through Jesus Christ, a perfect love, and a perfect gift. “The Eucharist is God’s gift of personal salvation, the essential religious act of our life, our personal experience of God’s saving pardon, our union with God as foretaste of eternal life.”<sup>64</sup>

Our daily life in this world is mixed with suffering and pain, calamities, sickness, solicitude and happiness, pleasure and sinfulness, poverty etc. In the midst of all the problems The Eucharist itself without losing its sacred character, enables us to cross this apparently impassable chasm that separates us from God, by being our daily bread, the frame of our everyday life, the sacrament of our personal spiritual history of Salvation.<sup>65</sup> In the gospel of John, Jesus says, “As I who am sent by the living father,

myself draw life from the father. So whoever eats me will draw life from me.”(Jn. 6:57). In Eucharist, Christ becomes spiritual food of our soul. We are nourished and fortified by living his very life. So Eucharist is our daily bread, the food that day by day nourishes our life and constantly build up our strength and also we have to grow in the love of God and of neighbor (GS No. 38).

## **Eschatological Dimension of the Eucharist**

As mortal men, we have a hope for immortal life, which Christ showed and has given us through his resurrection, he offered a resurrected life. The Eucharist is the grace of God operative in us to make our daily life part of Christ’s life.<sup>66</sup> In this case, our life in this world is not worthless but wrathful because we are in the plan of God for our salvation. In short, when we receive the Eucharist, “It is Christ’s life that we receive and which becomes the interior law of our own life; and in this life, under the veil of faith, we discover a hidden life, a crucified life, a life leading to death, what we call daily living, the daily cross to which we are nailed after the example of Christ.”<sup>67</sup> The same Christ is present in the Eucharist, our daily bread, the bread of life. So when we receive Eucharist it gives us the strength, light and grace, the daily bread we need to force the Challenges in our duty. So we can find our life meaning in him and may strengthen day by day with healing, power, mercy, perfection, holiness, in the journey

towards the heaven it continues until we reach God's heavenly kingdom.

The eschatological and joyous aspect of the Eucharist appears uppermost in the meager accounts that have been preserved of the liturgical 'breaking of the bread', in the primitive Christian community of Jerusalem. The meal of the risen Lord with his disciples had resumed the series of fraternal repasts that culminated in the Last Supper and broken by this death.<sup>68</sup> After his departure the disciples filled with joy of resurrection and the hope of proximate Parousia, continued to gather and to 'Bless God' to give thanks over the bread and wine of the community meal, a meal that would have included a 'remembrance' of the messianic marvel that they had witnessed, including the events of the Last Supper.<sup>69</sup>

### **Eucharist: the Refuge of Our Life**

The Eucharistic power frees us from our daily faults and preserves us from mortal sin. It demands our fully active participation with an open heart. Our daily life with all its miseries and human frailties, our imperfections and weaknesses of character finds in the Eucharist the remedy. Eucharist defeats the effects of sin, the poison that destroys the structure of our human condition. The sacrament of Eucharist is also a preservative against serious sin and spiritual death.

As a Christian our life is not essentially evil, we can look up for a better life, which is offered by Christ. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). So all Christ’s life has a saving value for us, but his death is clearly the climax, the utter manifestation of his love (Jn. 13:1). We should find out the eternal life and recognize its worth, the joy and beauty it offers. Our life is mixed grace; it includes sickness, solitude, the silence of God, the fear of the future, the risks of chance and of the unpredictable and unavoidable pain, sorrows etc. So we have to accept our daily experience with a healthy good will which sees the hand of God and ignores our situations. The pitiful situation in our life “is not hopeless since the Eucharist is our daily bread, offering us the grace which we need to live through our daily problems.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Our Journey and the Bread of Life**

Our journey through life is a pilgrimage back to our loving father, Salvation. Each day we travel as part of that way. As we travel down the highway of life, we have many needs; we especially need food for the spiritual journey. Jesus has given us himself in the Eucharist as our spiritual food to nourish us, to strengthen us, thus enabling us to continue life’s journey. At the same time we can’t fulfill our journey without him. Jesus says “Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you”. (Jn. 6:53).

In the Eucharist, Christ is always present with us and within us but he wants to give us this visible sign of his presence to reassure us of his presence and to strengthen our weak faith. Jesus daily, through the bread, invites us to come to His table, where we feel the providential love of God.

Jesus taught us the prayer ‘Our Father’, a perfect prayer begging God for all we need. A proper attitude for prayer is recognizing our poverty and total dependence upon our caring Father. This thought appropriately fits into the Eucharist. ‘Give us each day our daily bread is a humble acknowledgement that we must depend totally in our loving Abba’s providential care<sup>71</sup>, which we fully experience in the Eucharist. We should believe that the Eucharist has a power for everything, especially to give the life eternal, So Jesus reminds us “Apart from me you can do nothing”(Jn. 15:5).

Jesus invites us to a special meal which has many dimensions. “The Eucharist is a memorial, a sealing of a covenant, a thanksgiving, an expectation of the coming of the Lord, a presence, a prayer, a sacrifice of praise, a communion with Jesus and with one another.”<sup>72</sup> So Jesus invites us to his banquet. His gentle invitation is like personal call. “Come to me, all you who are weary and who find life burden some and I will refresh you” (Mt. 11:28). We can find its meaning in the whole hearted active participation of our self in the Eucharistic celebration which

gives us the bread of life, and eternal life; so we repeat the prayer with a joyful heart “give us each day our daily bread.”

There is no closer encounter than a mutual, coactive, and intimate union called Communion. Certainly any coactivity of creature and Creator is truly awesome, but in the Eucharistic encounter such intercommunion becomes eminently sacrosanct<sup>73</sup> In Holy Communion our body ingests and assimilates the sacramental elements that comprise Jesus’ own physical body, while he in turn assimilate us into his very self. Using the meaningful word “abide”, Jesus, with deft simplicity, describes this marvelous presence for us in the scripture: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (Jn 6: 56). For this Communion (mutual indwelling) of himself with his children God became man, Gods’ logos was made flesh, in Christ. And Christ gave himself for the people of God for the remission of our sins, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), which is the greatest gift he can give for us. St. Augustine says, “There is only one thing God does not know. He does not know how he could give us a gift greater than himself—and he has given us the gift of himself as bread in the Holy Eucharist.”<sup>74</sup>

In the desert there was no source of food or drink; survival was impossible. The Israelites had to depend totally

on Gods' providential love. God did not abandon them. He fed them miraculously with manna and quail. The history of Gods' providential care and the miraculous means he used to supply all the needs of his people were an ideal preparation for the gift of the Holy Eucharist to come centuries later.<sup>75</sup> Like the Israelites, we are wandering through the desert of life in this land of exile. We are on our pilgrimage to the Promised Land for our union with our loving Father for all eternity. In the desert, Gods' caring love supplied the only means of survival for the Chosen People; likewise, through the Holy Eucharist, Jesus has supplied us with all our needs for our spiritual journey. Each day Jesus invites us to the inexhaustible fount of spiritual nourishment in the Eucharistic banquet.



## General Conclusion

Today there is no Jesus who walks into butchers' shop, or accountants' offices or school classes to say "follow me", in the expectation that those called will literally leave everything behind and follow him on the way of discipleship. But Jesus himself remained central in post-Easter discipleship too. We have to explore deeply into the meaning of following Jesus in this present century.

The discipleship to which Jesus called is practical and not merely theoretical. The discipleship which allows it to become absorbed in theoretical debate and which does come to expression in practicalities of everyday life never exists in the discipleship of Jesus. The discipleship to which Jesus called was social and not merely spiritual. The discipleship to which Jesus called was corporate and not merely a matter of what the individual did with his / her aloneness before God<sup>1</sup>. The new covenant, like the old, had horizontal as well as a vertical dimension. It is called for love of neighbor as well as for love of God. Jesus' call to discipleship involves and demands participation in the life of God's new people. "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well"<sup>2</sup>

We are living in a consumer society. Profit motive is the main thrust of the present society. It is the duty of the

Christian disciple to show that love and service should be the true guiding principles. As a historical and human reality, Christianity lives in and through cultures and is sustained by culture. When a Christian Disciple is interested in selfishness, then he/ she is unfaithful to his/her vocation. "Institutionalism is a deformation of the true nature of the Church."<sup>3</sup> This will lead to some unfortunate consequences in Christ's Disciples' life.

The command of the Risen Jesus to follow him to Galilee is indeed the command and commissioning for the mission. So we cannot follow Christ without doing mission work. As a follower of Jesus Christ, we have to be living the Gospel in this present era.

"Follow Me" is the decisive command of Jesus Christ to the disciples (Mk. 1:17). A disciple is one who follows Jesus Christ. Act of following implies a journey after Jesus Christ. Firstly, He made a journey to Jerusalem (Mk. 10:32). This "Way" to Jerusalem is the way to discipleship. Jerusalem is the place of suffering. Those who followed Jesus were well aware of the ill-treatment awaited for them in Jerusalem. "They are on the road, going up to Jerusalem and Jesus was walking ahead of them, they were amazed and those who followed were afraid" (Mk. 10:32). A disciple must walk on this way to Jerusalem. There is no option, because discipleship of Jesus is essentially radical. A disciple must follow Jesus up to his Glory through Passion, Cross and Suffering.

After the resurrection, the disciples were asked to follow Jesus to Galilee. We have seen that Galilee is the place of Mission. The missionary activity is inseparably linked with discipleship. Here also the act is decisive and there is no option.

The most significant thing we have to remember is that in both these journeys, a disciple is not going alone. Jesus is going before to the disciple. Disciple is only asked to follow Jesus, who is going ahead of him/ her. Jesus Christ is always and eternally present before the disciples. Those who are following him are his true disciples.

Before inviting the disciples to follow him, Jesus sees them (Mk. 1:16, 19; 2:14). This seeing is very important. Jesus sees the inside of the disciples. Jesus sees in them something which others are not able to see in them. This is the mysterious aspect in every call to discipleship. In the last part of the Gospel, that is, in Mk. 16:7, we read "in Galilee disciples will see Jesus". So the evangelist is making an inclusion between Mk. 1:16 and Mk. 16:7.

Firstly Jesus sees the disciples. If the disciples want to see Jesus, they have to follow Jesus in his suffering, cross, rejection by others, persecution, death, glory and follow him in mission work. Galilee is the place of mission. If one person is able to follow Jesus in all these realities he/she is able to see Jesus. This is Christ's discipleship.

So we can very surely say that Christ's disciple is one who follows Christ.

Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI declared the Year of Faith by publishing the Apostolic Letter '*Porta Fidei*'. This is an opportune time to ponder deeply on the meaning of Christian discipleship and rededicate oneself to be a more perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. Faith is divine gift. We know that faith is human's positive response to the divine self revelation.

We have seen that a disciple is called to be with Jesus. Jesus is the culmination of Divine Revelation. A personal encounter and personal experience with Jesus is very necessary for grasping the Revelation of God. Faith is the assent of human intellect to the revealed mysteries. Though there is a human element in it, faith is essentially a divine gift. A contemplative method of Spirituality is appropriate for a Christian disciple to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. A Christian Disciple must open himself/herself to the divine truth revealed in and through the Church. A contemplative Spirituality will lead one to the union with God. Revelation and Faith take place as an automatic consequence of the union. A disciple who accepts Faith as God's free gift is bound to share the joy of being in faith to others. We shall try to observe the Year of Faith more meaningfully by being more perfect disciples of Jesus Christ.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Benedict T. Viviano, *Matthew*, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Great Britain, Geoffrey Chapman, , 1952, p.639.

<sup>2</sup> W.F., Albright, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Anchor Bible, New York, Doubleday, 1971, p.41.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> George Buttrick, *The Gospel according to Mark, The Interpreters Bible*, vol. VII, New York, Abingdom Press, 1951, p.276.

<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Texas, Word Books, 1989, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina series, New York, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p.42.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According To John*, Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1966, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina series, New York, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p.143.

<sup>11</sup> Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, New York, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> C. S. Mann, *Mark*, Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1986, p.22.

<sup>13</sup> Sesadima, Sunil, *Discipleship in St. Mark's Gospel*, Media house, Delhi, 2012, p. 26

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London, S C M Press Ltd. 1977, p. 51

<sup>15</sup> Best Earnest, *Disciples and Discipleship*, New York, T & T Clark Ltd., 1986, p.356.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Manuel Ezhapararampil, *Formation to Discipleship*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 2004, p.87.

<sup>17</sup> Paul J. (Ed.), *Harpers Bible Dictionary*, Bangalore, T P I, 2002, p.40.

<sup>18</sup> Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Call to Discipleship*, London, Logos International, 1973, p.34.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Sebastian Karotemprel, *Following Christ in Mission*, Bombay, Pauline Publications, 1995, p.95.

<sup>21</sup> Edward J. Mally, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Bangalore, TPI, 1982, p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*, Philadelphia, JBL Press, 1983, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> George Verwer, *No Turning Back*, Bombay, STL Books, 1983, p.58.

<sup>24</sup> Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Call to Discipleship*, London, Logos International, 1973, p.126.

<sup>25</sup>Burkil T., *An Examination of the Philosophy of Mark's Gospel*, New York, Ithaca Press, 1963, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup>James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus' Call to Discipleship*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987. p.345.

<sup>27</sup>Kingsbury, *The Christology of Marks Gospe*, Philadelphia, JBL Press, 1983, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup>Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, New York, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p.78.

<sup>29</sup>Michael T. Winstanley, *Come and See; An Exploration into Christian Discipleship*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in Gospels*, Cambridge, Society for N. T. Studies, 1965, p. 125.

<sup>31</sup>Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazereth*, Newyork, Doubleday, 2007, p.169.

<sup>32</sup>Dennis M. Sweetland, *Our Journey with Jesus; Discipleship According to St. Mark*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1987, p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, New York, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p.no.43

<sup>34</sup>Putherserry Paul, *Discipleship: A Call to Suffering and Glory*, Rome, Urbania University, 1987, p.325.

<sup>35</sup>Cfr. Ibid, p.258.

<sup>36</sup>Dennis M. Sweetland, *Our Journey with Jesus; Discipleship According to St. Mark*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1987, p. 59.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London, S C M Press Ltd. 1977, p.86.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest Lussier, *The Eucharist: the bread of Life*, Alba House, New York, 1977, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Xavier Leon – Dufour (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Theological Publications, Bangalore, 1967, p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Gifts of God* (article), p. 1, <http://www.christianarticledirectory.org>, 17-11-2011.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Xavier Leon – Dufour (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 201.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Dr. Joseph Thondiparambil, *Vishudha Qurbana Dhanavum Douthyavum*, Merit Enterprises, Alwaye, 2005, p. 26-27.

<sup>45</sup> Xavier Leon – Dufour (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 201.

<sup>46</sup> Stephan. T, *Manna* (article), William J. McDonald (ed.), *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.8, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1967, p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>49</sup> Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Magidah Khulda bat Sara, *Miraculous Manna from Heaven*, p. 2. <http://www.christianarticledirectory.org.17-11-2011>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Xavier Leon – Dufour (ed), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 334.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Dr. Joseph Thondiparambil, *Vishudha Qurbana Dhanavum Douthyavum*, p. 27.

<sup>59</sup> Mathew Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2010, p. 79-80.

<sup>60</sup> Malankara suriany catholica sabhayude, Koodasa Kramam, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, *Miscordia Dei*, April 7, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> J.Naluparayil, *Patheyasruti*, p. 174.

<sup>63</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Nos 1, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Benedict XVI. Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*.

<sup>65</sup> Ernest Lussier, *The Eucharist: the bread of Life*, Alba House, New York, p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Cfr. Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Cfr. C. Bernas, "Eucharist" *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (ed.) Editorial Staff, Washington D. C: The Catholic university of America, 1967, p. 596.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid,

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.146.

<sup>73</sup> Cfr. David E. Rosage, *The Bread Of Life*, Servant Publications, Michigan, 1979, p. 67.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>75</sup> John H. Hampsch, *The Healing Power of the Eucharist*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. David E. Rosage, *The Bread Of Life*, Servant Books, Michigan, 1979, p. 17.

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