



A weekly reflection by members
of the Precious Blood community

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“Only a God who suffers can save.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer



After months of ads attacking political opponents, it is disconcerting to wake up the morning after the election and hear the harsh language of the gospel: “If anyone comes after me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters...cannot be my disciple.” For Jesus, who left a legacy of “love one another,” this hate speech is disturbing.

We heard this kind of speech during the past few months. There is too much hate in the world today. Hate groups are on the rise. Cruelty has too often replaced civility in public discourse and private conversations. Family, friends, and neighbors have been divided over issues and candidates. So, it is difficult to hear Jesus speak of hate.

But then that is the point. Though the language Luke puts in Jesus’ mouth is an exercise in hyperbole, the point is the precious blood of the cross looms large over our commitment, and unless we are willing to embrace the cross, we are not ready to follow Jesus. Unless we are willing to risk everything, even our own lives, pour out our blood, sweat, and tears in the service of God’s love, we are not ready to be a disciple.

Discipleship is costly. As followers of Jesus, are we willing to pay the price?

Jesus uses a couple of examples to illustrate the steep cost of discipleship. In the first example, unless the one building the tower has calculated the cost of the project, he might run out of money and he and his half-completed tower would be a laughingstock in the community.

The cost of miscalculation is even greater in the second example because Jesus talks about a king going to war. We have seen in the last few years the cost of Russia's miscalculation in invading Ukraine has resulted in so much suffering and death. In the Middle East, the chaos and carnage continue.

In his book, The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it bluntly: "When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer understood the cost of discipleship as he had the opportunity to come to the United States and teach at a university when Hitler began his rise to power in Germany in the early 1930s. He came to New York in 1930 because even though he had completed his doctorate, he was only 24 and too young to be ordained a pastor in the Lutheran Church. So, he accepted a fellowship to do post-graduate work and teach at Union Theological Seminary.

He returned to Germany a year later in 1931. When Hitler and the Nazi party began to take over the government and the churches in 1933, Bonhoeffer became one of its most outspoken opponents. He delivered sermons on the radio denouncing Hitler. As early as April 1933, Bonhoeffer was one of the first to raise his voice of resistance to Hitler's persecution of Jews. In the mid-1930s, Bonhoeffer accepted a pastorate in England because he felt his voice was not being heard even by his friends, fellow pastors, and theologians in Germany. But he returned two years later to teach in the underground church as Hitler took over more control.

In 1939, when Hitler's evil was spreading rapidly, he accepted an invitation to return to Union Theological Seminary but stayed only two weeks, regretting his decision. His friends in the U.S. and in Germany pleaded with him to stay in New York. But he wrote to his friend, the philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr: "I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share in the trials of this time with my people."

He continued to speak out and resist the evil perpetrated by Hitler. He continued to write and teach as one of the leaders of the underground resistance movement until he was arrested on April 5, 1943. But he would not be silenced and wrote one of his most famous books while imprisoned, Letters and Papers from Prison, a compilation of correspondence that was smuggled out letter by letter by guards sympathetic to the resistance. One of these guards even offered to help Bonhoeffer escape but he feared retribution toward his family who were also imprisoned.

On April 9, 1945, a few weeks before Hitler's defeat and the liberation of the camps, Bonhoeffer and six other leaders of the resistance were stripped and led to the execution yard where they were hanged. Bonhoeffer embraced the cross as the consequence for living the truth.

Though we do not seek out suffering—that would be insanity—when evil rises, we seek to resist it with the force of grace and truth. Bonhoeffer could have stayed in the United States and written many more books and influenced the development of Christianity around the

world. But he understood the choice Jesus presents in today's gospel. We can choose to be safe and secure and not live with much passion or purpose, allowing the forces of evil to rise. Or we can believe in the power of the cross to resist evil, stretch out our arms, and be a force for good in the world.

With so much suffering in our world today and the rise of so much hate coming from so many different corners of the earth, it is more important than ever to weigh the consequences of speaking or not speaking our truth. When the lie becomes so large as it did in Nazi Germany, those who seek and speak the truth are silenced. But the more we live the truth, the truth will win out in the end.

As Precious Blood people, we believe in a God who sent Jesus to show us in Bonhoeffer's famous phrase, "Only a God who suffers can save." We are saved by the cross. Each of us must decide whether our lives will have meaning and purpose. To live our lives worthy of our calling God has given us demands courage, the courage to open our arms, take up our cross, and live our truth.

Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S., is a Precious Blood Missionary and is engaged in retreat, renewal, and reconciliation ministries throughout the United States. He currently serves as Vice Provincial for the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. To learn more about the Missionaries, [click here](#).

This weekly reflection is made available to all who are part of our Precious Blood family. Feel free to share it with others. Would you be willing to write a reflection? If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org