

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 21st 2016

Soon after I entered the Jesuit novitiate, those who had completed the initial two years of Jesuit formation took their first vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience on this feast day of Aloysius Gonzaga. It seems appropriate to me. Aloysius was the eldest of seven children and heir to the family title. His father, the marquis of Castiglione (Italy) dressed his little boy of four in a suit of armor and proudly took him to inspect the troops. However, as Aloysius grew, the lure of riches and honor did not excite him. The attractions of the 16th century court of Florence could not entrap him: at the age of ten, he vowed never to offend God by sinning. The marquis thought his eldest son would follow him, but Aloysius was interested in following another. At the age of 17, when Aloysius announced that he had decided to enter the Jesuit novitiate, it came as a blow to his father, who tried various ways to rid him of the idea. Finally, seeing that his son was determined to follow Christ, he consented.

Aloysius' extreme ascetic practices were tempered in the novitiate. He said: "I am a piece of twisted iron; I entered religion to get twisted straight." When the plague broke out in Rome in 1591, this young Jesuit scholastic, preparing for ordination, volunteered to help. He begged alms for the victims, carried the sick/dying into a hospital founded by the Jesuits, and cared for them. It was not easy; he confessed he was repulsed by the sight and smell of the sick. He overcame that repulsion, continued working with the sick (although his superiors tried to dissuade him), and became seriously ill. As he lay on his deathbed, he asked for communion. Looking at the crucifix in his hands, he pronounced the name of Jesus and died. He was twenty-three.

Aloysius understood the message of Jesus, "Enter through the narrow gate," and chose that narrow way leading to salvation. He accepted the call to follow Christ in freedom and love, knowing that he could have chosen the wide gate and the broad road, as many others did. As he let go of riches, honor, and pride, he discovered the road that leads to life. Alas, as our Friend and Master said, those who find it are few.

Let us make a quick prayer borrowed from Joseph Tylanda's Jesuit Saints and Martyrs:

Lord, help us to be like our brother, Saint Aloysius, who gave up honor and riches to serve you. Keep us untouched by the spirit of this world, so that we may seek your glory in all things. Amen.

Roland Coelho, S.J.-Creighton University's Jesuit Community