

Luke: 14:25–35

From Catena Aurea:

25. And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

THEOPHYLACT. For because many of those that accompanied Him followed not with their whole heart, but lukewarmly, He shews what kind of a man his disciple ought to be.

AMBROSE. For if for thy sake the Lord renounces His own mother, saying, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? (Matt. 12:48, Mark 3:33.) why dost thou deserve to be preferred to thy Lord? But the Lord will have us neither be ignorant of nature, nor be her slaves, but so to submit to nature, that we reverence the Author of nature, and depart not from God out of love to our parents.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But life must not be renounced, which both in the body and the soul the blessed Paul also preserved, that yet living in the body he might preach Christ. But when it was necessary to despise life so that he might finish his course, he counts not his life dear unto him. (Acts 20:24.)

CHRYSOSTOM. He means not that we should place a beam of wood on our shoulders, but that we should ever have death before our eyes. As also Paul died daily and despised death. (1 Cor. 15:31.)

BASIL. By bearing the cross also he announced the death of his Lord, saying, The world is crucified to me, and I to the world, (Gal. 6:14.) which we also anticipate at our very baptism, in which our old man is crucified, that the body of sin may be destroyed.

14:28–33

28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that for-saketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

BASIL. (in Esai. 2.) Or the tower is a lofty watch-tower fitted for the guardianship of the city and the discovery of the enemy's approach. In like manner was our understanding given us to preserve the good, to guard against the evil. For the building up whereof the Lord bids us sit down and count our means if we have sufficient to finish.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (lib. de Virg. 17.) For we must be ever pressing onward that we may reach the end of each difficult undertaking by successive increases of the commandments of God, and so to the completion of the divine work. For neither is one stone the whole fabric of the tower, nor does a single command lead to the perfection of the soul. But we must lay the foundation, and according to the Apostle, thereupon must be placed store of gold, silver, and precious stones. (1 Cor. 3:12.) Whence it is added, Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, &c.

THEOPHYLACT. For we ought not to lay a foundation, i. e. begin to follow Christ, and not bring the work to an end, as those of whom St. John writes, That many of his disciples went backward. (John 6:66.) Or by the foundation understand the word of teaching, as for instance concerning abstinence. There is need therefore of the above-mentioned foundation, that the building up of our works be established, a tower of strength from the face of the enemy. (Ps. 61:3.) Otherwise, man is laughed at by those who see him, men as well as devils.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For we fight against spiritual wickedness in high places; (Eph. 6:12.) but there presses upon us a multitude also of other enemies, fleshly lust, the law of sin raging in our members, and various passions, that is, a dreadful multitude of enemies.

AUGUSTINE. Or the ten thousand of him who is going to fight with the king who has twenty, signify the simplicity of the Christian about to contend with the subtlety of the devil.

THEOPHYLACT. The king is sin reigning in our mortal body; (Rom. 6:12.) but our understanding also was created king. If then he wishes to fight against sin, let him consider with his whole mind. For the devils are the satellites of sin, which being twenty thousand, seem to surpass in number our ten thousand, because that being spiritual compared to us who are corporeal, they are come to have much greater strength.

AUGUSTINE. (ut sup.) But as with respect to the unfinished tower, he alarms us by the reproaches of those who say, The man began to build, and was not able to finish, so with regard to the king with whom the battle was to be, he reproveth even peace, adding, Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace; signifying that those also who forsake all they possess cannot endure from the devil the threats of even coming temptations, and make peace with him by consenting unto him to commit sin.

AUGUSTINE. Now to what these comparisons refer, He on the same occasion sufficiently explained, when he said, So likewise whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. The cost therefore of building the tower, and the strength of the ten thousand against the king who has twenty thousand, mean nothing else than that each one should forsake all that he hath. The foregoing introduction tallies then with the final conclusion. For in the saying that a man forsakes all that he hath, is contained also that he hates his father and mother, his wife and children, brothers and sisters, yea and his own wife also. For all these things are a man's own, which entangle him, and hinder him from obtaining not those particular possessions which will pass away with time, but those common blessings which will abide for ever.

BASIL. But our Lord's intention in the above-mentioned example is not indeed to afford occasion or give liberty to any one to become His disciple or not, as indeed it is lawful not to begin a foundation, or not to treat of peace, but to shew the impossibility of pleasing God, amidst those things which distract the soul, and in which it is in danger of becoming an easy prey to the snares and wiles of the devil.

14:34–35

34. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

35. It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

THEOPHYLACT. But not only those who are gifted with the grace of teachers, but private individuals also He requires to become like salt, useful to those around them. But if he who is to be useful to others becomes reprobate, he cannot be profited, as it follows, But if the salt has lost his savour, where-with shall it be seasoned?

THEOPHYLACT. But because His discourse was in parables and dark sayings, our Lord, in order to rouse His hearers that they might not receive indifferently what was said of the salt, adds, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear, that is, as he has wisdom let him understand. For we must take the ears here as the perceptive power of the mind and capacity of understanding.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

14:25–27 Hating Family and Carrying the Cross

The Paradox of Loving Enemies and Hating One’s Own Family.

Augustine: On another occasion, the Lord says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own soul, cannot be my disciple.” As a rule, this is more upsetting to the mind of new Christians who are eager to begin at once to live in accordance with the precepts of Christ. To those who do not fully grasp its meaning, it would seem contradictory.... He has condescended to call his disciples to the eternal kingdom. He also called them brothers. In the kingdom these relationships are transcended, because “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is all things and in all.” The Lord says, “For in the resurrection they will neither be married nor marry, but will be as the angels of God in heaven.” Whoever wishes to prepare himself now for the life of that kingdom must not hate people but those earthly relationships through which the present life is sustained, the temporary life that begins at birth and ends with death. Whoever does not hate this necessity does not yet love that other life in which there will be no condition of birth and death, the condition that makes marriages natural on earth. Sermon on the Mount 15.

Jesus Permits Us to Love Family But Not More Than God.

Cyril of Alexandria: He says, "He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." By adding "more than me," it is plain that he permits us to love, but not more than we love him. He demands our highest affection for himself and that very correctly. The love of God in those who are perfect in mind has something in it superior both to the honor due to parents and to the natural affection felt for children. Commentary on Luke, Homily 105.

The Church is the Holy Mother of Your Natural Mother.

Augustine: The Lord gives the signal for us to stand guard in camp and to build the tower from which we may recognize and ward off the enemy of our eternal life. The heavenly trumpet of Christ urges the soldier to battle, and his mother holds him back....

What does she say or what argument does she give? Perhaps is it those ten months when you lay in her womb and the pangs of birth and the burden of rearing you? You must kill this with the sword of salvation. You must destroy this in your mother that you may find her in life eternal. Remember, you must hate this in her if you love her, if you are a recruit of Christ and have laid the foundations of the tower. Passers by may not say, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." That is earthly affection. It still has the ring of the "old man." Christian warfare invites us to destroy this earthly affection both in ourselves and in our relatives. Of course, no one should be ungrateful to his parents or mock the list of their services to him, since by them he was brought into this life, cherished and fed. A man should always pay his family duty, but let these things keep their place where higher duties do not call.

Mother church is also the mother of your mother. She conceived you both in Christ.... Know that her Spouse took human flesh that you might not be attached to fleshly things. Know that all the things for which your mother scolds you were undertaken by the eternal Word that you might not be subject to the weakness of flesh. Ponder his humiliations, scourging and death, even the death of the cross. Letter 243.

To Be a Disciple of Jesus.

Basil the Great: The Father did not send the only-begotten Son, the living God, to judge the world but to save the world. True to himself and faithful to the will of the good God his Father, he points to a doctrine whereby we may be made worthy of becoming his disciples with his severe decree. He says, "If any man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and his wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." This hatred teaches the virtue of piety by withdrawing us from distractions and does not lead us to devise hurtful schemes against one another. "Whoever," says the Lord, "does not carry his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Receiving the baptism of water, we make this same agreement when we promise to be crucified and to die and to be buried with him. Concerning Baptism 1.1.

The Form of Martyrdom Amid Civil Peace is the Death of Self-Will.

Symeon the New Theologian: I heard his holy voice speaking to all without distinction. "He who does not leave father and mother and brothers and all that he possesses and take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." I learned from Scripture and from experience itself that the cross comes at the end for no other reason than that we must endure trials and tribulations and finally voluntary death itself. In times past, when heresies prevailed, many chose death through martyrdom and various tortures. Now, when we through the grace of Christ live in a time of profound and perfect peace, we learn for sure that cross and death consist in nothing else than the complete putting to death of self-will. He who pursues his own will, however slightly, will never be able to observe the law of Christ the Savior. Discourses 20.1.

14:28–32 The Parables of the Tower and the King Preparing for War

The Parables Teach Fortitude and Zeal.

Cyril of Alexandria: Next he uses two examples to encourage his friends to an unconquerable strength and to establish those who want to attain to honors by patience and endurance in an unwavering zeal. If anyone wants to build a tower, he first counts if he has sufficient means to finish it. Otherwise when he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, people will laugh at him. Those who choose to lead a glorious and blameless life should store up beforehand in their mind a sufficient zeal. They should remember him who says, "My son, if you come close to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for every

temptation. Make your heart straight and endure.” How will those who do not have this zeal be able to reach the goal that is set before them?

“Or what king,” he says, “wishing to make war with another king, does not consider with himself, whether with his ten thousand he can prevail over one who is more mighty than himself?” What does this mean? “We do not wrestle against blood and flesh, but against governments, empires, the world rulers of this present darkness, and wicked spirits in the heavenly regions.” We also have a crowd of other enemies. They are the fleshly mind, the law that rages in our members, passions of many kinds, the lust of pleasure, the lust of the flesh, the lust of wealth, and others. We must wrestle with these. This is our savage troop of enemies. How will we conquer? “We will conquer believing that in God we shall do courageously,” as Scripture says, “and he will bring to nothing those that oppress us.” Commentary on Luke, Homily 105.

Virtue Built on the Foundations of the Tower.

Gregory of Nyssa: The Gospel somewhere says that a person who begins to build a tower but stops with the foundations and never completes it is ridiculous. What do we learn from this parable? We learn that we should work to bring every aspiration to a conclusion, completing the work of God by an elaborate building up of his commandments. One stone does not make a complete tower, nor does one commandment bring the perfection of the soul to its desired measure. It is necessary to both erect the foundation and, as the apostle says, “to lay upon it a foundation of gold and precious stones.” That is what the products of the commandments are called by the prophet when he says, “I have loved your commandment more than gold and much precious stone.” On Virginité 18.

14:33 Leaving Possessions Behind

Our Citizenship is in Heaven.

Basil the Great: Whoever would truly be a follower of God must break the bonds of attachment to this life. This is done through complete separation from and forgetfulness of old habits. It is impossible for us to achieve our goal of pleasing God unless we snatch ourselves away from fleshly ties and worldly society. We are then transported to another world in our manner of living. The apostle said, “But our citizenship is in heaven.” The Lord specifically said, “Likewise every one of you that does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.” The Long Rules 5.

14:34–35 The Parable of the Salt

The Tasty Salt is the Word of God.

Cyril of Alexandria: "Salt is good, but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what can it be seasoned? It is cast out," he says. He continues, "Let there be salt in you," that is, the divine words that bring salvation. If we despise these, we become tasteless, foolish and utterly useless. The congregation of the saints must throw out these things, by the gift of mercy and love to them from Christ, the Savior of us all. Commentary on Luke, Homily 105.

People of God are the Preservative of the World.

Origen: People of God are truly the salt of the earth. They preserve the order of the world. Society is held together as long as the salt is uncorrupted. If the salt lost its savor, it is neither suitable for the land or the manure pile. It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "He that has ears, let him hear" the meaning of these words. When God gives to the tempter permission to persecute us, then we suffer persecution. When God wishes us to be free from suffering even in the middle of a world that hates us, we enjoy a wonderful peace. We trust in the protection of him who said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Against Celsus 8.70.