

## Lenten Sermon: Rev Emile Pacifique, 5<sup>th</sup> week of Lent 2019

Today we are talking about costly grace. The theme of costly grace is eloquently and beautifully discussed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*, which is in the library, which you can check out and read, and you can see it on the internet as well.

One of my most memorable childhood stories is when the Gospel of John booklet was freely distributed in primary school where I was studying I got my copy. I read the booklet several times from the first cover to the last. The first Bible verse I memorised and can still easily say both in Kinyarwanda, which is my mother tongue, and French is John chapter 3, verse 16, which says "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life". At that time, I'm talking 50 years ago, I may have not fully understood the deep meaning of that verse, but I loved the idea that there was a God who loved the world so much that he gave His only Son to die and redeem us for eternal life. Isn't it so amazing to know that somebody cares? That somebody dies on behalf of you, because you are loved?

Of all celebration days in the Christian calendar, Easter has been always my best. On one hand it saddens to hear the story of Jesus being crucified. That story has been repeated over and over, and all the things which happened to Him. But on the other hand, you are grateful for what Christ did.

Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Romans. He said "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith" Again, Paul writing to the Corinthians, about how they must live, Paul reminded "For you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body."

God's grace – the gift of Jesus Christ – was costly. Costly, because innocent blood was shed. But it is not only the blood that was shed, it was also the glory that was given up. He emptied himself – that's what we read from the Scripture – so that you can access full life. On this, Paul wrote to the Philippians saying "Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form"

Here again is the cost of incarnation.

The term of grace is not an easy one. At the Bible College, we are taught about it. We learned from some lecturers that grace is the unmerited or undeserved favour and mercy God demonstrated in giving Jesus to mankind. Others say yes, that's okay, but not enough. They say the definition should include also the divine life, power and ability God makes flow and operate through us. This definition is, to me, good together.

The reason why God freely provided His grace according to His plan - before mankind was even created, the plan was there. He also enables us to respond freely to His grace. There are things we can do, things that we are capable to do, by God's grace which works in us. When Paul tells the Philippians "have the same mind which was in Christ Jesus," it is because he knows that they can actually have that mind. Probably not perfectly, but they can. When he writes to the Corinthians to live holy, he

knows that with the grace of God flowing in them, living in them, they can achieve that. But the most important response I suppose, is being grateful.

We repeat each time we meet on a Sunday, at the time of Eucharist or Holy Communion, we repeat these words “take, eat, remember, and be thankful.” Remember and be thankful.

We live in an age when we get too busy with priorities of work, or priorities of business, priorities that we have set ourselves that they keep us and don’t leave us any space to sit down and think, and say a gratitude. No space or time to reflect on what was achieved by us or for us, and be thankful. It’s very limited. Not that we never say thank you to anybody, but we may need to do more.

It seems to me there exist two sorts of gratitudes: a passive gratitude and an active gratitude. I would go for active gratitude. That is when we routinely take time to notice and be grateful. It can be good and healthy for us, not only Christians, but everybody.

I was browsing the internet and I found a post I liked because it’s about being actively grateful. It goes like this: *The benefits of practicing gratitude are nearly endless. People who regularly practice gratitude by taking time to notice and reflect upon the things they are thankful for experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and even have stronger immune systems*

That’s the cost we can pay too. To let go of things which absorb us and get us busier everyday, robbing us of the precious moment and sit down, reflect and be thankful to God. This may cost time, it’s costly.

Also being a disciple goes with cost as well. We are following the Lord who may tell us to go to work somewhere we would not prefer to go. This is a cost as well but God’s grace is with us and we will see ourselves completing things we never believed we would be able to accomplish. That is what disciples do. They are taught and then sent. Accepting to go, especially to a place you are not very sure about, is a cost as well.

It is when we are attentive and focused that we may be called to accomplish things and to serve. There is a cost there as well. But God’s grace which works within us will lead us. Am I ready to pay that cost? Are you ready to pay that cost? God bless you.