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“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another” (Rom 13:1).

Rom 13:1-10; Luke 14:25-33

Commemoration of St. Martin de Porres

In today’s Gospel, Jesus turns to the enthusiastic crowds following him to Jerusalem and makes clear just what discipleship entails. They must prefer him to their own parents and families, their hopes of settling down with a wife and children, and even their own lives. In another passage, he tells a would-be follower there was no time to say goodbye or even to bury your own father. “Let the dead bury their dead,” was a shocking thing to say about one of the most solemn duties of piety in any culture.

The starkness of his words revealed the urgency Jesus felt about the proclaiming the reign of God over all else, and many must have turned away when they heard his words. Even his own Apostles were not prepared to follow through on their promises to remain with him to the end.

Two short parables drove home Jesus’ point about being prepared to go the distance. Someone building a tower who runs out of money, or a ruler going to war without enough soldiers to match a superior force would both be put to shame. Commitment must be as deep as our heart’s resources and determination. Once we understand that our cross is our own unique potential, there can be no turning back, for to fail to follow through is to lose our very self. To know yourself and to pick up and carry the blessing and burden of who you really are is how we bring forth the Christ in us. Our authentic self is God’s image and likeness stamped on our being.

A rabbi was asked what question he most feared when he stood before God at the judgment: He answered: "Why didn't you become you?" We are all one of a kind, given the one task of becoming ourselves so the Beloved Community will be complete. What we often call suffering in our lives is being stripped of our false selves, illusions and attempts at being someone else.

The Shaker Hymn holds the truth: 'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down to where we ought to be. And when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight.

The Liturgical calendar today has the option of commemorating St. Martin de Porres (1579-1639). The son of Spanish knight and a freed black slave, Martin entered the Dominican Order as a lay brother. His low status immersed him in companionship and service to the poor and outcast of Lima, Peru. He is a model for the church of the poor and an important saint for the global South.

Jesus calls us all into solidarity with those in most need. It takes a continual conversion of mind and heart to let go of the advantages and status afforded many of us because of race, income and education. But those who accompany the poor discover a lifeline to God, who dwells with the poor. There is no other way to climb the ladder of holiness than to descend it to take our place with Jesus among the poor, within the poor, calling us to be poor for the sake of the kingdom.

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