

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother....”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, in the 1960’s, there was a football player by the name of Gale Sayers. He played for the Chicago Bears and ranks among the greatest running backs in all of professional football to this day. Around his neck, he wore a gold medal, about the size of a half-dollar. On it were inscribed only three words: **I am Third.**

Those three words became the title of his best-selling autobiography. The book explains why those three words meant so much to him:

“They were the words of my track coach, Bill Easton, back at the University of Kansas. Coach Easton kept those words on a little sign on his desk. One day, I asked him what they meant. Coach replied, ‘The Lord is first, my family/friends are second, and I am third.’ From that day on, I made those words my own philosophy of life.”

In his book, Gale says,

“I try to live by the saying on my medal. I don’t always succeed, but, having the saying around my neck, keeps me from straying very far or very long from it.” (Paraphrased)

The story of Gale Sayers illustrates the point Jesus makes in the 1st half of today’s Gospel.

**What, exactly, is the point Jesus makes in the first half of today’s Gospel, you ask.
Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

Here’s the point Jesus makes in the first half:

“If anyone comes to me without hating his father/mother...even his own life, he cannot be my disciple!”

Forgive the hyperbole, i.e., the extreme exaggeration, but Our Dear Lord’s point is...

We must give priority in our lives to Jesus and his heavenly Father!

And this brings me to the 2nd point Jesus makes in the 2nd half of today’s Gospel, namely:

“Which of you, wishing to construct a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost—to see if there is enough for its completion?”

In other words, it’s not enough to give top-priority to God. We must live-out that priority to God! We can make a good decision, but then we must make the decision good ...make it come true! And that’s the hard part. Sayers indicates this so clearly:

“It’s one thing to put God first in your life. It’s quite another thing to live-out that decision.”

This is why he says he kept the medal around his neck—to remind him to live-out his priority:

“I try to live by the ‘saying’ on my medal. I don’t always succeed, but having the saying around my neck, keeps me from straying very far or very long from it.”

*Once upon a time, some time ago, an L. A. Times reporter wrote a story about another, modern-day-Christian, like Gale Sayers, who put God **first** in his life, other people **second**, and himself **third**. The fellow’s name is Charlie DeLeo. (...nice Irish-boy!)*

Charlie grew up as ‘a tough kid’ on New York’s Lower, East Side. After returning from Viet Nam, he got a job as a maintenance man at the Statue of Liberty.

Charlie told the reporter that part of his job is to take care of the torch in the statue’s hand and the crown on the statue’s head. He makes sure that the sodium vapor lights are always working and that the 200 glass panes in the torch & crown are always clean.

Pointing to the torch, Charlie proudly said:

“That’s my chapel. I dedicated it to the Lord. I go up there and meditate on my breaks.”

But Charlie does other things for the Lord, as well.

He received a commendation from the Red Cross after donating his 65th pint of blood.

And, since hearing about Mother Theresa in India, to be canonized this weekend, he has given over \$12,000 dollars to her cause and to people like her.

Charlie said:

“When Pope John Paul II spoke in Battery Park, a mile and a half away from the statue, I stood on the catwalk that circles the torch and listened to the Holy Father’s talk. From that same catwalk, I prayed fervently for the success of the Pope’s visit to the United States.”

Charlie, further, told the reporter:

“I don’t socialize much, don’t have fancy clothes, but I have fun. The thing is, however, I don’t have enough money to get married. I don’t keep any of my money. After I got my job, I sponsored six orphans through those children’s organizations.”

Charlie ended telling the reporter that he calls himself the **“Keeper of the Flame”** of the Statue of Liberty. Later a park guide told the reporter:

“Everybody knows Charlie is special. When he first gave himself the title, people smiled. But we all take it seriously, now. To us, he’s exactly what he says he is: ‘Keeper of the Flame.’”

Charlie DeLeo started out in life as a tough kid from New York’s Lower East Side. But then, like Gale Sayers, he decided to put God first in his life, other people second, and himself third.

That good decision, which he made-good, changed his life forever.

Charlie is a living inspiration for us to do, quietly/i.e., humbly, in our own lives –as best we can, what he did: give top priority to God and, with God’s help, to live out that priority as courageously as we can.

After all, this is the message of today’s readings.

I now close with this prayer:

**“O Lord, I don’t ever expect to have the faith of Abraham,
Nor do I, O Lord, ever expect to have the leadership of Moses,
nor the strength of Samson...
nor the courage of David...
nor the wisdom of Solomon...
But, what I do expect, O Lord, is your calling on me someday.
What is your will, I shall do,
What is your command, shall be my joy....
And I shall not fail you, O Lord, for you are all ...I ...seek ...to ...serve.”**

May almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.