

Wednesday of 31st Week of the Year, 3 November 2021

When I opened to today's gospel, I wondered what congregation Jesus had in mind when he praised PEOPLE WHO PLAN...!

The IHM congregation surely deserves a gold medal for strategic planning all down the years. Louis Gillet may have begun without thinking of the future of the work... but the rest of us have made up for it in years of serious planning for the congregation and for our ministries.

Each of us had a plan when we entered religious life: it was to freely offer our lives and all that we possessed, to give ourselves entirely to God. Even the daunting task of not giving priority to our families nor to ourselves – as well as a willingness to 'carry our cross' – did not deter us.

The IHM Constitution offered us a way to follow Christ - and leaders of the congregation have always offered significant plans to fulfill our ministries in the church and beyond. Some plans worked; some did not. (No one laughed when our plans were thwarted as they were always made with serious deliberation and care for others. A few did laugh when we extended the cemetery not knowing that the option of cremation would come later!) Nevertheless, our ability and our decision to plan has helped to further Jesus' mission on earth under the mysterious guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Good planning is crucial for movement toward any valued goal, but equally important is the flexibility needed to accept *a change of plans*. Sometimes to take up our cross and follow Christ means letting go of our plans, no matter how good they may seem at the time. All that matters is our willingness, even under stress, to renounce anything that hinders our commitment to Christ, anything that stands in the way of total trust in God.

Taking up our cross may come as physical pain or mental distress, misunderstanding, rejection, jealousy, etc; but as St. Paul says in the first reading, what matters in the end is loving one another. Love fulfills the law and love does no harm to our neighbor.

We all treasure the writing on the wall in the foyer: 'Home is where each one lives for the other and all live for God.' It is a statement of our permanent intent to grow in love for one another. We also plan to grow in love for our neighbor, not to mention our planet.

I'm reminded of a time when the soybean harvest in the backyard was not good. It was not the farmer's fault, just a fact of climate, seed and soil. The story went around that Sister Amata Miller was petitioning the congregation to share the farmer's loss by lowering our profit from his rental of our property. Love is not a word; it is action.

There are a million simple ways to show love and support to friends and foes alike. It might take a little bit of planning to be an authentic disciple of Christ to one another. But we are up for it! At every stage of our lives Jesus continues to invite us to a discipleship that is willing to put God first and to bear whatever 'carrying our cross' entails. Let the planning begin.