

## **Feast of St Thomas More 23/24 June**

In the Gospel we see that Jesus didn't hide the reality from his disciples. He pointed out the difficulties, the hardships, and the sacrifices that would be required of those who would follow him. He told them in no uncertain terms that it wouldn't be easy. So they could not complain later on "Oh, we never thought it was going to be like this."

It's possible to be a disciple of Christ without being a disciple. One might just be a camp-follower rather than a soldier of the King. Some might not be pulling their weight or playing their part – a hanger on in a great work. A talker rather than a doer.

Once someone approached a famous professor about a young man and asked "So and so tells me he was one of your students. Is that correct?" To which the professor replied. "That man did attend my lectures, but believe me he was never a real student of mine."

It's one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in it there are many people who follow Christ at a safe distance, but perhaps very few real disciples, - people who actually do what Jesus said.

Let's face it. It's not easy to be a disciple of Christ. Discipleship has some practical demands. Yet we have had many comfortable church-goers who gave little heed to the misery of the needy and the groaning of the poor. Still today the Christian is called to renounce many things that are taken for granted by others.

Some followers melt away as soon as a demand is placed on them, like snow before the sun. Others are destroyed by opposition and criticism, like a fickle flame that is blown out by the first gust of wind.

When the King visited the monasteries of the great Zen master, Lin Chi, he was astonished to discover there were more than ten thousand monks living there. Wishing to know the exact number of monks the King asked, "How many disciples do you have?"

"Four or five". Lin Chi replied.

The truth is that there are degrees of discipleship and a lot depends on our ability and preparedness to “take up the Cross”. But whatever we do as disciples will take courage, generosity and self-discipline. We are all called to be disciples. Discipleship is born of our baptism. I wonder whether we can be humble enough to seriously ask “What am I capable of ? How can I make a difference ? Am I prepared to pay the price ?” ..... and then listen !

Of course we won't know in advance what we are capable of. We may underestimate or overestimate ourselves. We may need a challenge to bring the best out of us. Thomas More certainly understood that the cost of discipleship for him would involve separation and even alienation from family and loved ones.

Perhaps we can draw encouragement from those who have gone before us..... Thomas More, Mary of the Cross MacKillop and so many others. In a little book called “With Their Whole Strength”, William Wilson describes Thomas More as a “reluctant hero”. Reluctant perhaps, courageous certainly. By looking at these heroes we discover our own inadequacies. But inadequacy is not an excuse for inaction. The Gospel in fact offers hope to Christians who fail. Repentance and a second chance are always possible. Jesus is always generous with his grace to all who strive to answer his call. Perhaps each one of us might use the opportunity of our special patronal feast day to recommit to discipleship – be it in our families, in our parish, in our community. Who knows what we might achieve ?