**2 Pentecost, June 22, 2014;Genesis 21:8-21, Psalm 86, Romans 6:1-11,Matt 10:24-39;Rev Mary Trainor**

Some people seem to think that when you become a Christian, and decide to live as a Christian, things will become easier. Oh, things will become more fulfilling and meaningful, but they won't become easier. In fact, they can become more challenging....and you can even end up in situations that cause you to suffer because of your faith. In today's Gospel, Jesus is providing instruction to the disciples about what to expect - He is equipping them. We think of a disciple as a follower of Christ, but actually a disciple is a STUDENT of Christ too....in other words, a learner. WE are disciples too. It does not matter what age we are, we are all students of Jesus, learning how to live the Christian life.

Jesus gives a strange laundry list of seemingly disconnected things. These things, ranging from households to sparrows to swords to mother-in-laws, are actually all related as they all pertain to mission: to living out our faith. Even those words about family members being set against one another are helpful. These words don't mean that Jesus gives us permission to fight in our families; they do mean that we are to be faithful to Christ even if some family members don't like it if we live as Christians. We are to be confident in our faith, and in spite of being scared even share it, "***from the housetops.***"A recurrent theme throughout is that we are not to fear. Oh, Jesus knows there are things that will happen that will cause us to be fearful, but because of how much God loves us we need not be fearful. When we live into the love that God has for us, fear melts away! This is what Jesus meant when He said, "***Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."*** We find our life when we claim God's love. With His love permeating us we naturally ask Him first when we have decisions, when stuff happens. We find our true selves when we accept Jesus. When God increases in us, we become (as Paul said in today's Epistle) truly "***alive to God in Christ Jesus.***"

Christina did not have experience appearing before millions on TV when she sang this spring. She didn't have on fancy glittery clothes or stilettos, nor did she dance in provocative ways, like all the other contestants did -- she just sang her heart out - just as she was. She wore plain black oxford shoes, wire rim glasses, a crucifix around her neck, and a black nun's habit - with a veil covering her hair! Yet her YouTube video has received over 50 million hits! I am speaking of **Sister** Christina Succia, a 25 year old contestant on the Italian version of the Voice. On June 6, she won the top prize on this show! Now, one has to ask why this shy nun get way outside of her world and comfort zone to even try out for this show? When interviewed she said, her singing is part of her expression of "**the beauty of God**," and, she said "**I'm not here to start a career but because I want to impart God's message with the gift God gave me.**" Christina grew up in a rural area of Sicily, and settled into a career of accounting, but then she gave that up to do mission work for two years. This led her to follow her true calling: to join the Ursuline Sisters of the Holy Family. After winning the Voice IT, into her microphone on stage she thanked God for her victory and recited the [Lord's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Father_%28prayer%29) prayer. Sister Succia thanked God for her win, saying "**My presence here is not up to me, it's thanks to the man upstairs!"** When she was asked what faith is to her, she said: **“It’s like a tunnel: we come in and it all seems dark, confused. But in the end (there is) light, a living presence that embraces, which is THE hands, voice and breath** (of God).**Just be available to listen, to accept this gift, without being distracted by “noise” in the background. To answer the call of Jesus is liberating: it does not disappoint.“** Sister Christina risked failure, but endured by relying on God for her strength. Because she put herself out there witnessing to Christ in her way, millions of people will learn about Jesus who would not have otherwise.

**Proclaiming** (the Lord) **from the housetops** for her was on TV, and it may not be that for you. You too have God-given gifts to use as you live the life of a disciple. You too will need to take a risk when you put yourself out there, just as you are. You won't be wearing a nun's habit when you share your faith, you may be wearing swimming attire or work clothes instead. You will probably be sharing your faith with just a few people. God will take away the fear and give you strength.

There we were on a Sunday summer morning, camping in southern Colorado at the Great Sand Dunes. The Park offered a worship service at the campground's amphitheatre, so our family went. There were very few of us there, waiting for the minister to show up. No minister showed up. Instead a cowboy, boots and hat covered with dust, emerged from an old pick up in the parking lot to lead the service. He told us he was a horseshoer at a local ranch. We all looked around at each other, disappointed at first, but as he spoke and prayed we realized how we had so badly misjudged him - he was one of the best preachers I had ever heard! Oh, his message was simple and a bit inarticulate, and yet when he shared about meeting Jesus when he was going through a personal challenge I cried. As he spoke about what his relationship with Jesus meant to him, I experienced the living Christ right then and there.

And then there was Robert, a friend from Albuquerque. He is a Christian, and one of the brightest people I have ever met -- and also one of the ugliest (which he would readily admit). When you met him for the first time, he would say, **"take a good look at me, stare at me all you want....and then get it over with...yes, I am deformed and I sure look different, don't I?"** Robert's deformity actually was helpful to his sharing his faith because people felt they could come to him with their issues. His gift was his vulnerability and honesty, and He used it as a disciple; when Robert talked about Jesus you sensed Jesus' presence.

What is standing in the way of your serving God faithfully as a disciple? If you feel you are not smart enough or articulate enough, **remember the story of the horseshoer** who shared his faith. If you are concerned about being made fun of, **think of Sister Christina**. If you are concerned about how you look, **think about Fr. Robert**. If you are fearful of what might happen if you share your faith with people who are resistant, **remember Jesus' words today:** "**have no fear of them.**" Be faithful to your call to be a disciple of Christ, and be alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.