

About six weeks ago, my four-year old granddaughter participated in her first dance recital. Every Saturday for nine months between 9 and 11 a.m. she went off with her mom or grandma to get her “introduction to dance.” Now, the family was ready to see the fruits of all of that work.

As the curtain opened on a darkened stage, we could see the outline of two instructors...one at the front and one at the back...with nine little girls dressed in tutus in the middle. And in the middle of that group was my granddaughter. I was so proud.

Then, the instructors each went to one side of the stage and proceeded to mimic the steps the girls were to perform. The girls had been told that for those moments, the instructors were to be the most important people in their lives and not to take their eyes off them. So of course the four little girls to the left of my granddaughter never looked anywhere but stage left...and the girls on her right never looked anywhere but stage right...all tapping away. Being in the middle, however, my granddaughter spent the entire three minutes making faces and waving to the family members who brought her there.

I couldn't quit laughing for 15 minutes. For little Emily, the instructors weren't the most important people in that auditorium, the people who brought her were...and she devoted all of her time to doing whatever kind of dance you want to call it for them.

I share this story with you because our readings today are about the dance Jesus has invited us to dance. In our second reading from St. Paul, we hear: *Do not conform yourselves to this age.* In other words, don't dance that dance. Then he tells us, *Be transformed...that you may discern what is the will of God.* Or to put it another way, choose to dance THAT dance, following each step of the Shepherd.

In our first reading, Jeremiah relates: *You duped me, Oh Lord, and I let myself be duped;* then: *The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day;* and then: *I will speak in His name no more;* and then: *But then it comes like a fire burning in my heart...I grow wearing holding it in;* to finally: *I cannot endure it.*

Translation: I saw you at the dance and fell in love with you...but what you asked of me was so much and I was ridiculed for doing it. So I decided to quit doing it...and when I did, I realized that you were the partner I wanted to dance with and no amount of suffering could separate me from you. Love! Yes, when it came to choosing his dancing partner, Jeremiah sifted it out and chose the God of Israel.

Next, Jesus asks us a question we should all reflect on personally: *What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* Real profit comes in being a disciple of Jesus.

But today we learn from Jesus that there is a cost to that particular dance of discipleship. *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.* That's what it costs to dance with Jesus...and if you choose to dance with Jesus, you've got to let Him lead.

Someone who understood this quite well was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a Lutheran minister... but much of his personal theology was formed by Catholicism. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer defines discipleship in terms of cheap grace and costly grace. He says:

*“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal contrition. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus, living and incarnate.*

*Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it you will go and sell all that you have. It is the pearl of great price which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy. It is...the call of Jesus at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.*

*Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus. It is costly because it costs us our life, and it is grace because it gives us the only true life.*

*It is costly because it condemns sin...and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son... and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.”*

Bonhoeffer made a conscious decision to dance with Jesus. Like Jeremiah, He could not refuse the call of the Lord even if it meant leaving the safety of the United States to return to his homeland to preach about the atrocities of the Nazi government. That preaching eventually resulted in his arrest, conviction and a dance with Jesus at the end of a rope.

Being a disciple of Jesus requires more than showing up at church. It requires living the dance. It requires being holy, not just good. It requires affirming our faith even though doing so today could result in your being beheaded. It requires speaking out about something IMMORAL, even though it may be LEGAL.

Ironic isn't it that several weeks ago, our highest ranking elected official berated companies that use cross-border mergers to escape U.S. taxes, saying: *“I don't care if it's legal, it's wrong.”*

If I, on the other hand, were to say I don't care if abortion, or same sex marriage, or deporting children is legal, it's wrong...thanks to a new ruling...the IRS can now use my words to challenge the Church's tax exempt status. The authority to make laws rests with government. The authority to determine right and wrong rests with our God, through the Church to which he delegated His authority.

Yes, being a disciple requires action on our part...accepting that costly grace Bonhoeffer talked about, and then doing something with it.

In her book, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell writes that before Catholics can evangelize others, we must first make a choice to know and follow Jesus ourselves...and that continuing conversion is necessary to do that. She says we must become **intentional disciples** and presents a five-step process to help us get there:

1. We establish an initial trust with something identifiably Christian;
2. We develop a spiritual curiosity...desiring to know more about Jesus;
3. We grow to a spiritual openness...being open to the possibility of spiritual change;
4. We move to a spiritual seeking...asking Jesus if He's the one to whom we're called; finally
5. We make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and re-order our life accordingly.

**Intentional discipleship** is not about being invited to the dance...we're all invited to the dance. It's not about showing up at the dance, look at how many of us show up at church and leave unaffected. It's not about the refreshments at the dance...they're just distractions that keep us from dancing with the one who invited us.

Don't be duped by Satan. If you make the commitment to dance with Jesus...and you're willing to trust Him to lead...I promise you, you'll finally understand the joy of the Gospel, your wallflower days will be over...and Jesus will save the last dance for you. Jesus has his hand out, inviting you to dance. He wants you, no matter what, because after all, it takes two to tango.