

Last Sunday afternoon I joined the young adults of our parish, as well as some from UVA to climb Hanging Rock Mountain (I think that was the name), located about 20 minutes west of Charlottesville. We were to climb the mountain, celebrate Mass, followed by a meal and then descend. Altogether, there were close to 30 people who ended up on this climb. I rode with a few others and our driver, Dan, did wonders for my prayer life because of his rapid accelerations. It was the first hint there may be risk in this trip, God may be asking me for *something more*.

It was about 80 degrees when we departed from the Cathedral, so I wore a tee-shirt and shorts. Most, it seemed had extra clothing (except for a few others) and after arriving at the foot of the mountain I knew why, as the temperature had dropped 10 degrees.

We ascended at a pace of a racing horse and I quickly fell to the back of the pack, attributing this to my age difference and to the fact that I was carrying a rather heavy backpack with the Mass supplies and what have you.

Finally we reached the top of the mountain – literally jagged rock whereby you had to maneuver on all fours. It was a beautiful site, overlooking the valley, but also exposed to 20 mile hour winds. At this point, I was freezing. After a while of sitting, all began to look expectantly toward me and then one asked, “*Ready for Mass, Father?*” I responded with surprise, “*Right here, on the jagged rock?*” I was just having trouble standing, no less celebrating Mass.

Eventually we found a crevice where I could put the bread and chalice, away from the wind. I was having some issues and I realized again that *something more* was being asked of me, for which I had no manual, as I had never consecrated bread through Tupperware and the wine through the crevice of a rock, with wind whipping all around me. Mass went at a rather brisk pace and at the end of Mass, through chattering teeth, I said, “*Mass has ended let’s go.*”

And today, we hear the words of Jesus to the young man: “*Sell what you have then come, follow me.*” My experience on the mountain is a perfect analogy to this invitation, for to follow him may mean leaving behind our comforts, facing the winds that push against what we believe and climbing out on jagged rocks of life to be with him. Yes, to follow Jesus may mean ending up in difficult places.

I must say, though, while I was praying the words of consecration during our mountain Mass and seeing the great sky that surround us, I felt the true surge of his power and presence, especially in the words of the final doxology: “*Through him, with him, in him*” all things are possible when we live these words in all of life.

You see, if I had stayed home, avoiding doing anything, I would have watched the Washington Redskins and gone away sad. Symbolically, though, the message of that climb was clear: when we truly *did something more*, Jesus literally came to us in that Mass. Take a step in faith, in sacrifice, and Jesus will always come for us. Yes, it is far easier not to climb, not to step out and risk the cold, but in doing so, we will never experience the true power of his presence.

The young man stated that he had never done any harm and avoided all evil. His spirituality was defined by what he had *not done* and Jesus clearly states that is in not enough, saying “you are lacking one thing” or to put another way, *something more is needed*.

Imagine if we lived life in such way, defining worth by what we do not do. Would you want a pastor who defined his priesthood in such a way? A priest who never climbed the mountains, but stayed in his comfort, yet never doing harm? *“Yes, I am a good priest because I have never physically abused anyone nor have I embezzled or taken money out of the collection basket.”* Would that be your ideal?

Or, how about a spouse or in a relationship that was defined in such a manner? *“You’re lucky to have me, because I haven’t committed adultery.”* That is really raising the bar.

Or, a mother or father who defines their parenting by what they do not do? (i.e., I have never done this to my child. Yet, what have you done for your child?) As one teen said to me, *“I wish just for once they would ask where I am going and when am I to be home. I wish they would just show me that they love me.”* She clearly wanted *something more* from her parents.

Would, what *we do not do*, be anyone’s ideal? Jesus’ reaction to the young man is understandable in that context, for if we would not live in such way in every day life, how much more true in our faith? To define our faith by what we do not do and simply show up – this would never be accepted by us in life and certainly is true when it come to faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot be achieved by what we do not do. We may have not done much harm in life, but the real question is what have you done in life? Have you climbed difficult mountains and *done something* more for Jesus?

The young man would not follow, because he could not let go of his wealth and that was his issue. I do wonder if he committed to Jesus’ invitation to sell and follow, whether Jesus would even have allowed him to follow through with it. Jesus may have only wanted to know the true depth of his commitment. The young man’s reaction may be not so different from ourselves. On all of our coins and bills are the words: *“In God we trust.”* Do we hold on or trust enough to let go of our wealth and follow him in our lives?

There are many middle of the road Christians, committing to nothing in our faith. The middle of the road belongs to yellow streaks and dead animals. We all want the good, but few want to pay the price: To give all that God might give all to us.

The young man was the only person in the entire New Testament who left the presence of Jesus sad. What about ourselves, after being in his presence during Mass? Do we leave sad, or angry, or empty after hearing his words? If so, perhaps *“something more is needed.”*

That “something more” request is unique to each one of us. Each of us has to face what Jesus is asking of us to be truly saved. As for myself, I think he is asking of me to love more. For example, in the Gospel we are told Jesus loved him – despite knowing he will reject his invitation. It has always been my prayer to love through the rejections...

*Lord let me love them even though they begin to fall asleep mid-way through the first reading. Lord, let me love them when they are indifferent to me. Lord, let me love them when hit with critical words. Let me love the man who never smiles...because, just maybe one day he will smile and that “something more” will be just enough.*