

# "Yes...but" Catholics

13th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C

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*1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21*  
*Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11*

*Galatians 5:1, 13-18*  
*Luke 9:51-62*  
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With regard to the Scriptures and the teachings of Christ, I recall a person explaining to a priest, with a tone of all reason and logic, "Father, if I followed everything that is in that book, I would have to change my entire lifestyle!" In interviewing potential candidates for the RCIA, I have been told, on occasion, by the person by making the inquiry, "I am looking for a church that will accept me for who I am."

There is an attitudinal phenomenon of which almost everyone is guilty one way or another. We eagerly embrace the idea of the Gospel, of Christianity and of being a part of the Church, but with stipulations that make it more agreeable to our particular individuality. The late Pope John Paul II referred to this phenomenon as "cafeteria" Catholicism. I like to refer to it as "yes...but" Catholicism.

Jesus was no stranger to the reality of his followers wanting to classify "their" following; adjusting it according to their own circumstances. We hear it throughout the Gospel with potential disciples. Many who hear his message receive it with great enthusiasm and declare at least their intention to become His followers. Then they follow up by integrating a couple of provisos: *Yes*, "I will follow you wherever you go," *but...*"let me first bury my father," "let me say farewell to my family at home."

Not much has changed among Christ's followers down through the

centuries. All of us have at least the intention to follow Jesus unreservedly; at least the intention to be a part of His Church. Yet how often do we add stipulations, provisos or exceptions; our own style of "yes...but" Catholicism? *Yes*, I am

Christian, *but* I do not believe in 'organized religion'. *Yes*, I am a Catholic, *but* I do not agree with everything the Church teaches. *Yes*, I follow Christ, *but* I still believe in a woman's right to choose. *Yes*, I love God, *but* I do not believe I have to go to Mass on Sunday to be a

'good person'. *Yes*, I am Catholic, *but* I am more traditional/liberal. *Yes*, I am Catholic, *but* I am not religious.

Jesus is aware of the shallowness of His potential followers' intentions and He responds to their requisites accordingly. In a few familiar passages it would seem that Jesus is determined to lay on, as heavily as he can, the obligations and expectations that come with being His Disciple; His own "yes...but" answer to their "yes...but" stipulations: *Yes*, you want to follow me, *but* "the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." *Yes*, you want to be my disciple, *but* "let the dead bury their dead." *Yes*, you want to follow me, *but* "no one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit..." In another place, Jesus says to a prospective follower: *Yes*, you have followed the law, *but* you still must "go sell all you have and give to the poor, then come

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follow me." It is a wonder that any of His followers stayed considering the unyielding provisos Jesus Himself heaped upon those who expressed an interest in following Him. Unmoved by the conditions of those who hear His word, Jesus continued to remind them of just what it means, without exception, to be His follower.

It is, indeed, a hard reality to grasp that the Church founded by Christ is not oriented toward simply accepting us as we are, with all the conditions, provisos and stipulations we wish to attach to our embracing the Gospel; that *yes*, Jesus accepts us as we are, *but* loves us too much

It is, indeed, a hard reality to grasp that the Church founded by Christ is not oriented toward simply accepting us

to leave us that way. Rather, Christ, in and through the Church calls everyone to an ongoing conversion of our lives; a refocusing of our priorities, a changing of our lifestyle, a re-orienting of our outlook to the standards, challenges, and life-giving priorities Jesus has given us in His preaching of the Kingdom of God. We are called to embrace the reality that *yes*, Jesus loves us, *but* He also calls us to a complete and ongoing conversion if we are to be His followers.

Fr. William Nicholas  
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