

René Descartes, the seventeenth-century French philosopher, is famous for saying, “*I think, therefore I am.*” With that statement, he became known as the father of modern philosophy. His words represented a radical shift: they placed the human person—and human thought—at the very center of reality.

To be fair, much good has come from this shift. Respect for the dignity of the individual and remarkable advances in science have been made possible by a confidence in rational thought. In this sense, we owe Descartes credit for helping to usher in the modern world.

But his revolution in human thought also comes at a cost. By turning everything back on the self, society soon began to imagine that we can create ourselves, that we can decide or even redefine the very nature of who we are. We lost the sense that life is a gift, received from a loving Creator. We began to treat truth not as something to be discovered and revered, but as something we invent or adjust according to personal preference. And yet, there is only One who can bring something out of nothing, only One who can think reality into being—and that is God alone. He, and only He, is Almighty. This is why Jesus in today’s Gospel asks us to renounce not only family but even our very selves. He does not wish to sow dysfunction or confusion. On the contrary, He wants to save us from the chaos that comes when we try to make ourselves the center of reality. He wants to free us from the exhausting illusion that we must create our own truth.

When Jesus tells us we must “hate father and mother” to follow Him, He is not commanding us to despise those dearest to us. He is using a Hebraic expression that means we must prefer God above all else. Matthew’s Gospel makes this crystal clear: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37). Even our closest relationships cannot come before the call of Christ. As the Catechism reminds us: “*Family ties are important but not absolute. Just as the child grows to maturity and human and*

*spiritual autonomy, so his unique vocation which comes from God asserts itself more clearly and strongly. Parents should respect this call and encourage their children to follow it. They must be convinced that the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus”* (CCC 2232). Discipleship is not about rejecting love for others, but about ordering every love through the primacy of God’s love.

To follow Christ, then, is to surrender everything to Him—our plans, our relationships, our comfort, even our very selves. As Darrell Bock states in his commentary on today’s gospel: “The giving up of ‘everything’ means recognizing that God has claim on all areas of our lives. Part of discipleship is learning from God what he desires in these areas. No one can know at the start of the walk everything involved, but one can enter the journey with an understanding that God has access to all that we are.”[1]

And so we must ask: Do I really trust Jesus to provide for me? When He asks for something difficult, do I trust that He will supply the grace I need? It is easy to claim we have surrendered all, when in fact we may have only surrendered what is comfortable.

So who is at the center of my life? If it is myself, then I walk a dangerous path. If it is Christ, then I can say with joy and conviction not “I think, therefore I am,” but rather:

“God is, therefore I am.”

“I believe, therefore I am.”

“I am loved, therefore I am.”

“I am His, therefore I am.”

[1] Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life. The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 402.