A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to his son, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut and then we'll talk about it."

After about a month the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!"

The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair...." To which his father replied, "Yes, and they WALKED everywhere they went!"

I thought I would start my homily with a little humor because in all of today’s readings we heard about the serious topic of the cost of discipleship, the consequences and implications of dedicating one’s life to God. A little humor might make the topic of the cost of discipleship easier to hear. In our first reading we heard about Elijah being told by God that he is to make Elisha, his successor as a prophet to Israel. Elisha is a simple farmer working the fields when Elijah throws his cloak over him to let him know he has been called by God to dedicate his life to God. The call to be a disciple comes to ordinary people like you and I, doing ordinary things, like working in an office, working on equipment, taking care of children and doing homework. We should expect God to reveal His divine will in the ordinary tasks of our lives – NOT necessarily in smoke and thunder.

If we, like Elisha, hear that call and say “Yes”, like Elisha we can use the implements, such as the talents, gifts and resources of our ordinary lives as a springboard to our newly committed lives. God has gifted me with a strong voice which I use to proclaim his word and speak to others about the kingdom of God. What has God gifted you with that will help you become the disciple God has called you to be?

In our second reading from Saint Paul’s letter to the Galatians we heard about freedom versus slavery. Some of us, including me when I began my journey, think that by our consent to follow Jesus we will be bound by a set of beliefs, a catalogue of doctrines, a code of ethics, and a list of rules. Nothing can be further from the truth. Accepting the “call” means we are intimately united with the person of Jesus. Jesus purposely walked into Jerusalem knowing that he was to suffer, die, be resurrected and ascend so that all of us could have eternal life. He was set free and has set us free. The gift of salvation is precisely that – a gift. There are no strings attached. The accepting of gifts given in pure love creates in us an eagerness to respond with a like love. What could be more free that an eager response to love? Free to model our relationship with others based on the person and behavior of Jesus. From our first two readings we can see that even though discipleship is demanding we have the freedom and God given tools to help us on our journey.

In our gospel reading from Saint Luke we heard Jesus, as he walked resolutely toward Jerusalem; invite all of those along the way to follow him. There are four different responses to Jesus’ invitation. First, the Samaritans refused to welcome him because he was a Jew! His own
disciples still unsure of what the kingdom here on earth would be like want to call down fire from heaven to consume them.

Retaliation is not present in the person of Jesus. Should we as disciples of Jesus lash out at those Catholics who have left the church because they refused the invitation? Should we as disciples lash out at those of other faiths because of their beliefs? Invitations are not commands. They may be refused regardless of the loss such refusal implies.

Still others who were invited respond without realizing what discipleship entails. We, like Jesus, have to be ready to go wherever the Father wants us to go. We have to be open to where and how God leads us.

Others respond not realizing their choice to follow him eliminates other choices. We can easily put other things before Jesus, even things like family, friends, money, jobs and time. But as his followers, we look to Jesus first to see where he is leading us. This invitation involves total conversion, requires our total energy, loyalty and devotion.

Finally, others who are invited put following Jesus off until later and find a lot of excuses and ways to justify them. A true disciple gives a wholehearted “yes” to Jesus. Nothing distracts her/him or gets in the way – not even suffering, rejection or persecution. In fact, Jesus’ followers will pray for their persecutors. A true disciple trusts God completely and surrenders to his lead fully – we don’t look back. We try walking ever forward without looking back. The kingdom of God which Jesus came to establish here on earth must be our only dwelling place.

Jesus, knowing our imperfect human nature, left us the gift of the Eucharist, which we celebrate as the central part of the Mass: He gave us the gift of the Eucharist for those times when we need to be strengthened and fed for the journey of walking as His disciples. I would like to share with you something from a resource called “Living Liturgy” that struck me as I was doing my research for this homily.

I wasn’t aware that the Mass has several mini-journeys or processions that lead us from one place to another. These mini-journeys, or processions, have a goal. During Mass there are four of these processions:

1. The first is the entrance procession that symbolizes our journey from being individual members of the Body of Christ to being the Body of Christ gathered around the one Head, Christ visible in his church.

2. The second mini journey is the procession with the Book of the Gospels from the altar to here at the ambo to acclaim the Presence of Christ in the proclaimed word. It is also a symbolic expression of our journey from hearing God’s word to putting it into practice.

3. The third procession is the presentation of the gifts which symbolizes the gift of ourselves presented to God for transformation into being more perfect members of the Body of Christ, just as the bread and wine are transformed into being the real Presence of Christ. As the gifts are placed on the altar we place ourselves on the altar
and offer ourselves with Christ in sacrifice. It is symbolic of the ongoing journey of self-sacrifice that characterizes Christian discipleship.

4. The Communion procession is the last of the four processions. It symbolizes our journey to the heavenly banquet in which we already share by partaking of Jesus’ body and blood at Holy Communion and also in which we will forever share when we die and go to heaven. This procession most clearly proclaims what it means when the communion lines actually come forward toward the altar. If you are able, as you come forward to receive His body and blood, know that this is your “yes” to God’s call, to your individual discipleship.