My friends, when someone you love is asleep and needs to wake up, have you had the experience that it sometimes takes more than words to wake that person. Sometimes, you need to shake that person before they will wake up. That shaking has the effect of shocking that person into consciousness. How many people here needed to be shaken awake this morning to get to Mass on time?

Bishop Barron gives this analogy as a way of approaching the 14th chapter of St. Luke. This homily utilizes his thoughts on this passage. This chapter has a number of teachings from our Lord of what it means to be a disciple and then Jesus says something that is very surprising and shocking. Jesus drops on us a spiritual bomb shell that shakes us to our core. Listen to what Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” And if you check biblical commentaries to make sure that this is the right translation here, the word here is hate. If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Can you imagine how the people following him received Jesus’ words here? Imagine if you heard this after following Jesus for a while. Who does he think he is? Does he think he is better than my family? There must have been a few people scratching their heads. This guy spoke about love of God and love of neighbor. He even told us to love our enemies? Now we have a commandment to hate those who are closest to us. What gives? I bet Jesus lost a few disciples after teaching this odd commandment. What are we to make of this?

My take on it is, when we are asleep in the Spirit life and need to be awakened, we sometimes need to be shaken. This is what Jesus is doing to us here with his words. He is trying to shake us into a new spiritual consciousness. Ironically, as we will discover, Jesus is showing us a valuable pathway to real happiness.

Let me ask a question. Deep down, are you really and truly happy? Think about it. In fact, ask yourself, how many people do you know who are really and truly content? Do you know very many people who are really and truly happy? I don’t know very many people who really are. St. John Vianney listened to confessions for over 15 hours each day. Towards the end of his life, someone asked him to share his thoughts about humanity. Do you know what he said? He said that people are a lot sadder than they seem. People are a lot sadder than they seem. People know how to put on a good show. We know how to look happy, but are we?
My friends, maybe our culture has got this happiness thing all wrong. Perhaps, as a society, we got ourselves into the grips of an illusion. I'll be happy when I have more pleasure. I'll be happy when I have more power. I'll be happy when I have more honor. I'll be happy when I fill up my yearning ego with enough attachments. I'll be happy when.

Do you know what the hard spiritual truth is? None of it makes us truly happy. When we get more power, wealth or fame, we get a rush. It feels good. But then, soon after, we get restless and want more. Soon the world can become a quest for more money, more wealth, more fame, sex and power and so on. My friends, what if I were to tell you that right in front of you, you had everything you need to be happy. What if the holy grail of real happiness is right before you in every single moment? This is what I think Jesus is telling us today in this strange Gospel reading.

By way of example, did you know that Victor Frakl argued that there were happy people at Auschwitz? There were sad people too, obviously. But Frakl wanted us to pay attention to the fact that there were happy people detained there, who were eventually killed there. They didn’t have money. They didn’t have wealth. They didn’t have power. Yet, Frankl argues that there were happy people at Auschwitz despite the horrific crimes that were being committed towards them. These were people whose happiness did not depend on attachments to anything. Edith Stein, a Carmelite, a saint, was arrested at her convent and was sent to Auschwitz to die. Witnesses saw her on the train, in a cattle car, in her habit ministering to the people around her. How was she spiritually able to do this? How was this possible, what gives?

Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Christians, the nuance behind Jesus' words here is, you must hate all these things in the measure that they become for you attachments, in the measure that you are using the relationships in your life for ego gratification. In that strange spiritual act, you will find freedom and joy. And ironically, you will only then be able to authentically love your family and yourself, perhaps, for the very first time.

My friends, every so often in the spirit life, we need to be shaken. We need to be shocked out of complacency. Jesus invites us to hate the attachments and possessions the world, our society, soap operas, and commercials on television say we need to be happy. Hate those attachments. When you detach yourself from unhealthy attachments, an amazing thing happens. You don’t need the latest gizmo to be happy. You don’t need alcohol or drugs to be happy. You don’t need a different marriage or different family to be happy. Even on a cattle car going to Auschwitz, you can find everything you need to be happy.
My friends, sin clouds our minds from seeing this spiritual truth. This is why Jesus is giving us spiritual shock treatment this Sunday (clear! Boom!). And so, I would like to conclude by inviting everyone to look at the cross for a moment. There he is, there is Jesus, there is God himself. He is naked, thirsty, hungry, impoverished, hated, and dying. And yet, that is the happiest man alive. When we grasp that truth and incorporate this into our lives, then and only then will we grasp what happiness really means, what peace really means, what eternal life really means, and yes, what salvation really means.