

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 4, 2022

SCRIPTURES:

Wisdom 9:13-18	God's will is supreme and sovereign.
Philemon 9-10,12-17	No longer a slave but a brother.
Luke 14:25-33	Disciples leave all else behind.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Luke:

On the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus instructs his disciples concerning the values of the kingdom and the requirements of discipleship. Luke uses this whole journey as an image of the Church's journey through life on its way to the fulfillment of God's purposes in the heavenly realm. Jesus continues to accompany the disciples to this very day; He journeys with us along the way; He teaches still; He works the miracles that proclaim the transformation of earthly reality into divine reality. The Christian community hears the words of the Master and witnesses his deeds of mercy and of reconciliation. The Church finds comfort in both the words and deeds of the Lord.

There have been several prior instances of Jesus teaching the demands of discipleship: in Chapter 9, verses 23-27 and 57-62. There, too, Jesus calls for a radical departure from one's former ways. The commitment of the disciple has to be all or nothing.

Hate: Luke reports these very Semitic expressions persevered even among Gentile Christians. Love and hate: there can be no in-between for the ancient Semites. *To love less is to hate.* Comparatives and superlatives are expressed concretely: *Very holy* can only be expressed by *Holy, Holy, Holy!, etc.*

Their own cross: It is strange that Jesus would speak of the cross as an image of the suffering and pain that his disciples would have to undergo before he himself has suffered it. Most scholars believe that this expression comes from the later experience of the followers of Jesus and is here retrojected into the mouth of the Lord himself. Surely, Jesus must have spoken of the suffering and pain that his disciples would have to endure but to call it their cross most likely arose after the event of Jesus' own cross.

Jesus inserts two short parables as part of his teaching on discipleship. 1. The king who must calculate the odds of victory or defeat when his assets are less than that of the enemy. 2. The builder who must assess his materials before beginning his project for fear of beginning something he may not be able to complete. Clearly, the teaching consists in the fact that God supplies what human weakness cannot. The Christian needs only to believe that God will give the victory. Assurance of success comes from the almighty power of God, who can take our limited resources and turn them into spiritual victory for the sake of the kingdom. What will become of those who are never able to see anything through to completion? The problem is that they do not even *begin* for fear of failing!

In the same way, none of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions. (So then, you cannot be my disciple unless you give away all you own [Contemporary English Version]). The literary link here is obviously with the parables just cited. Jesus draws a conclusion

from those two parables: If it takes even the giving away of all your possessions in order for you to find success in your following of the Master, you must be ready to do even that! Jesus does not give a direct command to give away all we have. He says that our hearts must be ready to do that if it should be required of us.

Some of us hesitate to approach Christ for fear of what the consequences might be! How much will be asked of me? What am I going to have to give up? Will God take my loved ones away? (There are those who fear that God will get vicious with me if I leave myself too far open to him!)

Wisdom:

The Church does not hesitate to draw from ancient books that are not part of the Hebrew collection of Scripture. Wisdom was most likely written about 150 years before the Common Era. Living in the midst of Greek-speaking pagans in Alexandria, these Jews who knew little or no Hebrew at all had to be taught that their faith possessed enough culture and philosophy in its own right. The wisdom of God is far superior to any earthly or human wisdom.

Philemon:

A single-chapter letter of Paul to his Christian friend Philemon, to whom Paul is sending back his escaped slave who has now become a fellow Christian! As far as Paul is concerned, slavery has been transcended in the new reality that comes from baptism into the body of Christ. What need is there to be concerned with such limited and limiting categories as freedom and slavery when brotherhood in the blood of Christ is the only reality worth considering?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been afraid of having to give up too much if you give yourself too openly to God? What kind of God is this who waits for us to make ourselves available so that he can make us suffer? Is this the loving Father whom Jesus Christ called his *Abba*? Why is it that some of us are ever willing to believe that God is made in our cruel image, rather than that we are made in his merciful and tender image?

2. Discuss the idea that less is better, which some modern-day prophets are trying to teach us. Can we really get along better with fewer possessions? What kind of freedom comes to you when you are willing to live a simpler lifestyle? Tell each other the story of St. Francis of Assisi and of St. Clare who found perfect joy in the starkest poverty. What can we learn from the experience of these great saints, we who have to live in a world where success is often measured by the amount of money we make?

3. What lesson is there for the Church community in the teaching of Jesus that we should be willing to give up all we own in order to follow him? Should your parish give away its sanctuary, its parish hall, its educational building? What can Jesus mean for the community's simplicity of life?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Ask your family to join you in making a complete inventory of all that you own in terms of personal items: clothing, footwear, sports equipment, knickknacks, souvenirs, collections, etc. What items would you be willing to give away before the end of the year?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, we adore you and we praise: here and in every church throughout the world. By your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

(St. Francis of Assisi)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

Total surrender to God and to God's will requires a spiritual maturity that rests on God's holy grace and on our wholehearted cooperation with that grace. Discipleship can never be based on half measures. Jesus calls his followers to an unconditional commitment to God and to God's ways.

Many of us have become most cautious about commitments. We hedge our bets, so to speak. We make sure there is an escape route before we enter into anything binding. For fear of losing everything, we reserve some of our assets before entrusting what we own into some venture, including the assets of our hearts sometimes. This attitude of caution and of reservation will surely interfere with our call to discipleship.

In the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, we hear that "half measures availed us nothing." Nothing short of total self-surrender to God would work. Even after having admitted powerlessness over the drug and agreeing that life had become unmanageable, those who would recover and find freedom from their addiction are invited to "make a decision to turn their lives and their will over to the care of God." The "Big Book" explains that this surrender cannot be conditional. The Third Step Prayer says: "God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt (...). May I do Thy will always!" "We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to him." *Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 64*

The disciples of Jesus cannot deal with discipleship as if it were a part-time endeavor. We do not put it on for Sunday and take it off the remainder of the week. It is not like a job to which we give some of our time and our attention.

Discipleship is a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Redeemer. The person of Jesus cannot be put on and put off like a garment, whenever convenient. One does not enter into a partial relationship with another. Relationships with persons cannot be hedged. We give ourselves to another or we do not. It is the same with God. We cannot be *for God, partially*.

When we respond to God's call and offer ourselves to God for the building of God's kingdom, God has a right to call upon us at will. God should be able to call upon us for *whatever purposes* God may intend. Anything short of that is meaningless discipleship.

See: The Catechism: #618

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