

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

[Reading I: Wisdom 9:13-18b](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14-17](#)

[Reading II: Philemon 9-10, 12-17](#)

[Gospel: Luke 14: 25-33](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090422.cfm>



Rembrandt, Paul in Prison, 1627

Jesus presents a clear picture of discipleship to those who are following. Discipleship is not something that one adds to other aspects of life, like an activity or pastime. Discipleship requires total commitment.

Family connections were the foundation of society in the ancient world. Many people married distant cousins to keep family connections strong and resources within the family. Meals were the common way to keep relations solid. It was a source of controlling everyone and keeping the members dependent upon one another. To give up family meals meant giving up on the family. If one preferred another family or social structure, it was viewed as hating the family left behind. Hating was not wishing them ill. In our vocabulary, one would be preferring Jesus and his mission to others and moving them out of the center of one's life.

Jesus calls disciples to make him first in their life. Being a disciple meant making Jesus the center of life and all other relationships, activities, and possessions be assigned a secondary place. It is not that people, responsibilities, or possessions have no value. They have importance in their proper place in life.

Secondly, those who respond to Jesus' call will experience the same treatment that Jesus experienced. One will be stepping into conflict. The priorities, values, and vision of a disciple will be contrary to those of people around us. Honor, possessions, or social standing is not the goal of a disciple. Disciples, following Jesus, wash the feet of others, associate with the poor (who cannot give you anything), and attend to the sick, the lame, and other marginalized people in their lives. This behavior will be ridiculed and rejected. Even Jesus' own family thought he was out of his mind and came to take him home. The cross will take many forms in the opposition experienced in business, education, and relationships. The disciple needs to show the life of Christ even when there is opposition, including forgiveness, love of enemy, and prayer for those who oppress.

Finally, being a disciple requires one to trust in God completely as Jesus did. Trusting in possessions, titles, knowledge, or oneself is not enough for a Christian. Jesus is the source of life, and there must be a trusting reliance with Jesus to live as a disciple. Discipleship involves not just doing a few deeds. Discipleship necessitates a complete reliance on God through every aspect of life.

The two presented parables stress that one must realize the cost of being a disciple. It involves loss and risk. Discipleship is not the easy way to live life. Much will be demanded of a disciple, and one must consciously follow Jesus and not give up when suffering arises.

The first reading is from the Book of Wisdom, written in the century before Jesus. It praises God's Wisdom and contrasts it with the folly of human wisdom. Humans are limited and finite. They can only understand in a limited way and often miss the deeper truth. The one to whom God gives wisdom or with whom God shares his spirit has a greater understanding and possesses a far greater grasp of the truth. One must pursue this wisdom and learn how to recognize the true message of God.

Paul's letter to Philemon is a very short (25 verses) and personal letter. This is the only time it is read on Sunday in the three-year cycle of readings. There is background and context we do not know, like where Paul was in prison and why Onesimus fled Philemon's household. Paul identifies that the church meets at Philemon's home and that Onesimus has been his slave. Onesimus found Paul and became a Christian, "my child," while Paul was imprisoned. He writes to Philemon and asks that Philemon take Onesimus back as a fellow Christian. There is an echo of Paul's Letter to the Galatians where he states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, ... neither slave nor free person, ... not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus". Baptism changes all relationships. Onesimus has become a brother in Christ.

Secular society has been built on a market economy. Each person has a value based on how they can enrich someone else. An employer can enrich a person through their paycheck, and the employee enriches the employer through the work provided. Each person benefits from the action of the other. The Christian economy is based on gift. God gifts us first, and this allows us to gift others and pass along the gifts that have been received. For Paul, Onesimus will enrich Philemon not by the labor of a slave but by relating as a brother in Christ. Paul invites Philemon to enter into a new relationship with Onesimus based on baptism.

Reflection Questions:

What challenges have you faced in being a disciple?

What have you experienced in trusting God as you move into an unknown situation?

How does baptism challenge your understanding of your relationships with people from other places and traditions?

Themes

Challenges of Discipleship

Baptismal Identity

Human vs. Divine Wisdom

Discernment

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that God will open our hearts and minds to God each day and be vigilant against allowing anyone or anything to displace God as the center of our life

For the gift of Wisdom: that the Spirit of God will enlighten our minds and guide us in making loving and life-giving decisions each day

For all who are suffering for their discipleship: that God will strengthen their spirits, make them bold in witnessing to the Gospel, and open the hearts of those who are oppressing them to God's love

For a true appreciation of our possessions: that we may accept them as gifts from God, use them to serve God and others, and never be possessed by them