

You know, there are many weekends when we hear the first reading and it just passes us by and we don't really connect it to anything. But way back in the 80s, the Church did an amazing job at finding readings for Mass that allowed the first reading and the Gospel to connect to one another. This connection shows us how God's plan for us has been unfolding for thousands of years as described in the books of the Bible.

This weekend's first reading from the Book of Wisdom is just amazing. I love it when it says "the deliberations of us mortals are timid. Our plans are unsure. We are burdened and weighed down by this earth and our bodies and our concerns."

What it's saying - I don't know about your life, but it's telling me the truth. I can barely figure out what's going on here on this earth. I have trouble figuring out things right in front of me. But the things of Heaven - who can figure all of that out? People who have received wisdom from the Holy Spirit - those people can see how the lifelong journeys of us here on earth might make sense.

We Catholics have the benefit of 3800 years of God speaking to us from the time of Abraham to today's Church. That benefit that we have with our faith tradition is that we have the words of people over thousands of years who have been given insight into God's ways by the Holy Spirit. Their wisdom has been collected in the Holy Scriptures and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. If you want your kids and grandkids to hear some of this wisdom, get them here to Mass and to Sunday School. Our faith and our tradition is built on this wisdom of the Holy Spirit from on high. Wisdom is saying that we need to choose the things of heaven over the stuff of earth.

You heard the psalm today: "In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge." God *has* been our refuge – our place of shelter when the confusion of this world becomes too much. From Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, to David, to the Prophets. God has been there when our human minds are confused. Jesus is the Wisdom of God in human form.

But Jesus' message today sounds confusing. It's confusing for anyone who lives on this earth - and has a family - and has friends - and lives what I would call a normal life. Anybody here like that?

Yeah, the word "hate" sounds a bit strong. In our day and time, the idea of hate – like a hate crime, is widely held up as one of the worst things a person can do. So it's shocking to hear this kind of statement from Jesus.

But if you're a teenager, you might actually think this is one of Jesus' easiest sayings. Think about it. Can't stand my mom and dad? Check. Can't stand my brothers and sisters? Check. Hate my life? Check. Maybe if you're a teenager, this is one of Jesus' easy sayings. But for everybody else, this is a tough saying of Jesus.

I think that in this case, Jesus is exaggerating. He doesn't actually want his disciples to harbor ill will toward their father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or children, or wife, or themselves. He doesn't want them to harm themselves. He is using the imagery of hate in order to emphasize that you can prefer no one else to him. He is to be loved above all. And if you love your father, mother, sister, brothers, wife, children, or if you love your own life more than you love Jesus, you can't be his disciple. And you have to be willing to break family ties if your family opposes the call of Jesus in your life.

Because Jesus knows the price of discipleship, he's making his point through these very strong images. He is not proposing a comfortable faith with an easy road to heaven. He is asking way more of us than weekly church attendance and occasional prayers for special needs.

Last week, he told his Pharisee host not to invite family to a holiday cookout, but the poor, lame and blind. Yes, Jesus talks crazy a lot. But Jesus knows that most of the stuff that we pay attention to, is really not important for the life to come. He has said that in so many different ways - not just in today's Gospel.

In 1st Century Judaism, who were you supposed to love more than your parents, or your spouse and children? Who would have the right to demand that you love them more than your parents? What right does Jesus of Nazareth have to demand that you love and honor him more than your father and mother? Who demands that kind of exclusive, and absolute, and supreme love? Well, it's the Lord himself, God himself.

Jesus didn't go around the streets of Galilee saying, "Hey everybody, I'm God." But the only reasonable explanation for how he could ask for such love is that he isn't just the Messiah, he isn't just the king of Israel, he isn't just a prophet, but he's the one God of Israel. Come in person, fully God, fully man.

He knows that you've got to plan ahead – not as an earthly human, but as a disciple, someone who plans on being with him *after* this life. *Those* plans are constructed in a different way. With an eternal perspective. That's really what the Gospel's about today, having the wisdom to put first things first. And the first thing is Jesus.

We are all called, on some level, to live out that same spirit in our own lives, where we always put Jesus first and love him above all things and above all others. Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer