

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 8, 2019

## Giving It All Up for God

*Written by Angie Windnagle*

**Wisdom 9:13-18b**

**Philemon 9-10, 12-17**

**Luke 14:25-33**

COMMIT TO CHRIST



One of the major turning points in my life was in college when I visited rural Central America. I walked among some of the physically poorest of the poor. Yet in the depths of their hearts, I saw a love that I had never seen before in my life. Although they had almost nothing, they were eager and ready to share their food with us. Despite not owning a Bible or a missal, they joyfully participated in prayer times and Masses. They were a walking contradiction, somehow despised by this world and all its glamor, but rich in faith and living a simple yet vibrant spiritual life. It opened my eyes and heart to the Gospel in a more profound and tangible way. I saw firsthand that no earthly want or need could ever be more filling than a heart in love with God.

This Sunday's readings bring to mind the same theme of contradiction. In the Gospel, we hear Jesus speak about hating and leaving family, when usually we desire to put family in a place of priority. He speaks about embracing our cross and leaving this world behind, when we usually worry about earthly sufferings and how we will alleviate them to live more comfortably in this world. They are opposed forces on the surface, and my challenge is to meet Jesus in these seemingly contradictory words and find the pearl of wisdom that will bring me new life.

What I find most striking about the Gospel is that it begins and ends with a call to detachment, with a message of preparation sandwiched in the middle. How does hating mother and father relate to preparing to lay a foundation? What does giving up all earthly possessions have to do with a king preparing for battle? In the index of the Ignatius Bible, it says that the call to hate mother or father is

about being “prepared to part from anyone who prevents [us] from serving [God].” Instead of trying to downplay what Jesus is saying, we can see that the strong word choice helps us understand the radicalness of the call to be a disciple. If *anything* gets in my way of serving and following Christ, I need to detach from it.

The reality Jesus shows us is that discipleship is not easy or nice. It requires a determined decision to prepare and commit to life with him. Just like the builder or the king, we need to understand our goal and how we will get there. Life with Christ is beautiful and radical, but it’s not won without detachment. A builder plans ahead so he has enough supplies to finish the job. A Christian plans ahead and is ready to embrace the inevitable crosses that come and live as a citizen of heaven on this earth. To live a life in Christ, we have to be ready to give up what is of this earth, so that we are free to be open to what is not of this earth but of what is of God.

In the second reading, St. Paul beautifully shares his lived experience of this detachment and preparation. Though in prison, he is joyfully living a life in Christ. His hatred of the world has been replaced by joy rooted in God alone. And though physically lacking, spiritually he is so full that his love and joy overflows into the early Church as he pastors and guides them even from prison. The first reading starts with “Who can know God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?” God’s ways are not our ways. If we follow the ways of the world, we will never taste the sweetness of God. The call to discipleship is a call to live a life of contradiction, always ready to let go so we can receive.

In one of my favorite books, “Happy Are You Poor,” Fr. Thomas Dubay writes: “If we wonder why, despite the millions of us who follow Christ, the world has not long ago been converted, we need not look far for one solution. We are not perceived as men on fire. We look too much like everyone else. We appear to be compromisers, people who say they believe in everlasting life but actually live as though this life is the only one we have.”

The challenge for myself then is to look at my life with Gospel eyes and see what in my heart still belongs to this world, what in my heart seeks to run from suffering and daily crosses, and what in my heart I haven’t fully given to Christ. Then, to make a plan, renounce it all and live radically for Christ.

*Angie Windnagle*

## PRAYER

I beg of you, my Lord,  
to remove anything which separates  
me from you, and you from me.  
Remove anything that makes me unworthy  
of your sight, your control, your reprehension,  
of your speech and conversation,  
of your benevolence and love.  
Cast from me every evil  
that stands in the way of my seeing you,  
hearing, tasting, savoring, and touching you;  
fearing and being mindful of you;  
knowing, trusting, loving, and possessing you;  
being conscious of your presence  
and, as far as may be, enjoying you.  
This is what I ask for myself  
and earnestly desire from you.  
Amen.

— *Ignatian Prayer for Detachment*