

“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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” Words from our Gospel today from the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

You know I think we recognize a bargain when we see one. As such, we go about cutting out coupons, shopping at competing stores, and are bombarded with advertisements telling us of upcoming sales. For instance, now around Labor Day is a good time to buy a car when the new 2020 vehicles are in and you can find a deal on the “old” 2019 editions. Can you imagine, in a couple of months, all that leftover Halloween candy will be available for sale when trick or treating is over! And days like cyber Monday and Black Friday following Thanksgiving are popular bargain shopping days. We even have TV shows where people appraise different antiques and junk items like Sanford and Sons or Auction Hunters: Pawn Shop Edition. We are good at recognizing value.

Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus went around making his sales pitch for the Kingdom of God. “The Kingdom is like a fine pearl or a treasure buried in a field. So desirable, so valuable is the Kingdom of God that anyone would give everything that he or she had so as to obtain such a pearl, such a share in God’s Kingdom,” Jesus would say, along with many other similar parables about how great the Kingdom of God was. Jesus would then reinforce his message with miracles and signs that indeed proved what he was talking about, casting out demons, curing the sick, feeding thousands, letting the oppressed go free. But he was also up front in his sales pitch. Just to be sure people knew what they were getting themselves into, he reminds his audience of the associated costs of discipleship and the implications of what it means to be a disciple. Because being a disciple is not a light decision, but one that affects every aspect of one’s life – everything must be subordinated to Christ, even the relationships one has with family and friends. And being a disciple is not an easy life for it requires commitment and perseverance, especially when challenges inevitably arise – we must take up our crosses; discipleship is not for romantics and idealists who have their head in the clouds because real grace doesn’t come cheap – we must be willing to renounce our possessions. The decision to follow Jesus was even more drastic in those early days of the Church when Christians were hunted down, and killed on account of their witness to Christ but even today, our secular world abhors Christianity; it’s not popular to be pro-life; it’s not popular to forgive; it’s not popular to espouse self-giving love and community when society increasingly values narcissism and individualism.

But let’s examine the cost of discipleship and the three conditions of discipleship Jesus lays out for us a little more closely.

The first condition is hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life. Please don't misunderstand Jesus. In this context the idea of hate is better described as loving less. In other words, God must be the first priority of our love. It turns out that loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength doesn't take away from our other relationships, it enhances them. For instance, Onesimus was a runaway slave and St. Paul sends him back to his master Philemon today of which we hear about in our second reading. Paul was asking on account of the relationship that we all have in Christ, Onesimus would be received not back as a slave but as a brother. If this is the case between people of different social classes, imagine how much more our relationships with those whom we love will be transformed. In choosing to prioritize and love God as disciples, we are thus choosing to love our families in an even greater way.

The second condition of discipleship is that we must take up our cross and follow Christ. It happens that crosses come in many shapes and sizes. Maybe your cross is grief, addiction, shame, family strife, pride, depression, impurity, health, financial troubles... It is difficult to carry these burdens and reckon with the realities of life. In life, we are inevitably stuck with these crosses, but if we take them to Christ, there is no telling what God could do with them because the cross is our tool of transformation. Consider that the cross itself was meant to be a symbol of scandal and shame. And yet, the cross stands as a testament to the conquering love of God, that there is nothing that he couldn't love us through, that a resurrection is held in store. As such we claim the cross as one of our most exuberant symbols, and this coming week on September 14th, we celebrate as a Church the triumph of the cross through which we obtain salvation.

Finally, the third condition of discipleship is the renunciation of possessions. Certainly, these can be material possessions, but Jesus talks about these in the same way that we talk about the successes of constructing a new building or achieving a victory against opposing forces. Our accomplishments on earth, we can't take those with us either. Our pride dies with us too. As we sit down and calculate the costs of our various projects, we see that at the end of the day, none of our endeavors or possessions comes with us. Yet, in renouncing these futile things for the sake of Christ, we realize that with God, indeed we have all things.

So what initially seemed like a harsh and difficult sales pitch to awaken us to the realities of life, furthermore reveals to us that discipleship comes to us at a bargain. Relationships are messy, we all have crosses, none of us can hold onto our possessions forever. Yet seeing as how these are the costs of doing business, of living in this world anyway, we aren't giving up much on our part that we aren't already paying for anyway... what a Bargain! In giving our relationships, our struggles, and our possessions over to God, he transforms them into our very salvation. When we seriously consider these costs of discipleship, we see that the intangibles of life give way to something infinitely greater when we decide to invest in Christ

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/090819.cfm>

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 129

Reading 1 [WIS 9:13-18B](#)

Who can know God's counsel,
or who can conceive what the LORD intends?
For the deliberations of mortals are timid,
and unsure are our plans.
For the corruptible body burdens the soul
and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.
And scarce do we guess the things on earth,
and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty;
but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?
Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?
And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.

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

R. (1) In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
Which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Reading 2 [PHMN 9-10, 12-17](#)

I, Paul, an old man,
and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus,
urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus,
whose father I have become in my imprisonment;
I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.
I should have liked to retain him for myself,
so that he might serve me on your behalf

in my imprisonment for the gospel,
but I did not want to do anything without your consent,
so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary.
Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while,
that you might have him back forever,
no longer as a slave
but more than a slave, a brother,
beloved especially to me, but even more so to you,
as a man and in the Lord.
So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

Alleluia[PS 119:135](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let your face shine upon your servant;
and teach me your laws.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus,
and he turned and addressed them,
“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.
Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me
cannot be my disciple.
Which of you wishing to construct a tower
does not first sit down and calculate the cost
to see if there is enough for its completion?
Otherwise, after laying the foundation
and finding himself unable to finish the work
the onlookers should laugh at him and say,
‘This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’
Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down
and decide whether with ten thousand troops
he can successfully oppose another king
advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?
But if not, while he is still far away,
he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms.
In the same way,
anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions
cannot be my disciple.”