

[Wisdom 9:13-18b, Psalm 90; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33]

Do you have what it takes to be a disciple? Don't panic: You don't have to "hate" your family. Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago: The word "hate" which Jesus uses in the context of this Gospel translates as "to love less." First priority, requiring our greatest love and attention: God. How do we get to God? Through His Son, Jesus Christ. By making time and giving the effort to get to know Him, fall in love with Him and serve Him.

Second priority: your relationships. Love them less than you love God.

Frankly, it's awkward no matter when we read this teaching. I mean, how many of us really hate our families? Sure, certain family members get on our nerves once in a while. We have falling-outs from time to time for all sorts of reasons: political or religious differences, lifestyle choices, insensitive remarks made in the heat of an argument, as well as real injuries suffered at the hands of those who can hurt us deeply because we love and trust them the most.

But even when a spouse, parent, child, or other relative disappoints us terribly, the majority of the time we still don't find it in our hearts to hate them. Something in us still yearns to be reconciled and reconnected. There is no peace until the mending of bridges starts and the healing has a chance to begin. Even if it isn't possible to receive that person back into our lives again, we know we need the balm of divine forgiveness to close the wound that remains between them and us. Because, at the end of the day, no matter what that other person did or failed to do, we're still family, and that is the strongest bond in the world.

Third priority: your material and financial possessions. That means being ready to "renounce" your possessions. In classic spiritual language, it is called "detachment." You put your material possessions in proper priority.

Fourth priority: you! It's been said that we find out who we are, we learn what we are called to be, and we discover that in taking care of ourselves, in reaching out to our families and to those in need, and putting all of our financial and material possessions at the service of the Lord, we learn that God is there the whole time. Love God, love others, and love yourself. God is in the other.

Jesus is up against tribe-and-clan mentality, people who put blood ties ahead of any and every concern. Love, and avenge your people, and regard warily everyone else. Two thousand years later, this translates into a different language, but with the same bigotry and racism: You don't want to marry HIM; he's Italian. You don't want to date her, she's German. You're bringing home a goim, a shicksa? (a non-Jewish man or woman).

How can you be a Republican? How can you be a Democrat? You know what they say about Muslims... What do you mean they're not Catholic?

Brothers and sisters in Christ do not have the luxury of defining their loyalties so narrowly. So, of course, love everyone as a Son or Daughter of God, or as a Brother or Sister in Christ. Consider it your starting point for the love of all people to follow. Doing all of this just might be the Holy Cross that God is challenging us to pick up and to carry with His Beloved Son.

Perhaps we might even have to die on that Holy Cross as He did. But we know that this is not the end of the story.

Jesus does not teach hate and self-loathing. Jesus is commanding us to put ourselves and our relationships all at the disposal of the will of God. What does that mean? It means: how can I bring my family members and other relationships closer to God? How do I myself draw closer to God and to God's will for me and for my family?

That is a good starting point. Every morning, when we first awake, ask ourselves while standing, sitting or kneeling, "Lord, here I am. What is it You want me to do to be closer to you? What do you want me to do and to say to bring my loved ones closer to you?" Being a disciple of Jesus is no small or easy task. It will take standing apart from family ties. It will mean denying your very self. It will mean rejecting materialism. It may mean being rejected by others.

September 8 is traditionally observed as the Birthday of Mary, Mother of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus entrusted His Blessed Mother to us, making us all family, all related, all sons and daughters of God.

We hear in the Book of Wisdom, our First Reading today: "Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?" The saints did and

still do. Some of our ancestors did. They gave bold witness and made bold choices and made bold proclamations in the name of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. This weekend, Pope Francis canonizes one of our contemporary women as two years ago, he canonized two men who are of our lifetime: Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. John Paul 11. The holy woman who was a contemporary of theirs and ours is now called St. Teresa of Calcutta. Certainly these three saints didn't hate their families and DID have THEIR priorities right.

In her lifetime, Mother Teresa was an icon of God's tender mercy, radiating the light of God's love to so many, through the works of mercy, both material and spiritual. From heaven she continues to fulfil her mission as she "lights the light of those in darkness on earth." With her canonization, the Church presents her as a model and intercessor of those who, like her, "long to light the fire of love and peace throughout the world." She can be taken as a patron saint especially for those who are most in need of God's mercy.

By her example and through her intercession, may Mother Teresa inspire many to give their 'hearts to love and their hands to serve', starting with those closest to them. May we all continue to live and deepen our awareness of being in need of mercy and our willingness to extend mercy in our communities, in our families and in our service of the poor.

Commemorative holy cards of St. Teresa of Calcutta are in the back of church near the Sunday envelope offering baskets. Feel free to take one.

Like St. Teresa of Calcutta, let us pray for and fast for and actively work for peace -- peace in our world, peace in our families, peace in our hearts -- in this world and in the next. What a wonderful birthday present that would be Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Blessed Mother. Mary, Queen of Peace, Refuge of the Poor, pray for us sinners now, at our moment of need and at the hour of our death. AMEN! St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us! AMEN!