

23rd Ordinary Sunday
September 4, 2022
“Jesus, Before Anything Else”

Wis 9:13-18
Phil 9:12
Lk 14:25-33

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the hardships of life is the fact that things don't always turn out like we expect them to be. No matter how hard we try to have a good outcome with everything we do – all too often, something goes wrong. We calculate, beforehand, what will be demanded of us – Then, later, we discover that much more is required than we originally thought. Fortunately, all the scriptures for today deal with this same issue in one way or another.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the crowd just how demanding a commitment to him will be. Jesus had many “would-be” disciples. He had many who followed him just to see what he would do next. It was truly an exciting time!

Consequently, Jesus tells them that their attachment to him must be absolute. It must be stronger than our love for father, mother, spouse, children, or brothers and sisters. It must be stronger than even our love for our own life.

Jesus is using hyperbole when he says “hate”. This was the common Jewish way to emphasize contrast. Simply put, we just can't love anything more than Jesus if we want to truly love him and to be his followers. Furthermore, we must accept the hardships of life – We must carry our own cross – if we would truly follow Jesus out of love!

Then, Jesus goes on to say that people fail at discipleship – They fail at life's commitments – Because they don't look deeply enough into what they are undertaking. They fail to look at the short term and long term consequences of their behaviors – They don't realize that hard decisions will be required of them as their relationship with Jesus and God unfolds and grows.

This was, certainly, the case for both Onesimus and Philemon in the New Testament passage for today. Onesimus was an escaped slave. Somehow, he sought out Paul in Rome and began to serve him, freely. In that new relationship, Onesimus became a Christian. And then, Paul convinced him to return to his former master.

Paul couldn't possibly eliminate slavery in the social order of those times. However, he could enlighten Philemon to a more godly way of thinking and believing. Paul was sending back Onesimus not as a slave – but as a brother in Christ. Furthermore, he hoped that Philemon would not punish Onesimus. But, instead, treat him as a beloved brother in Christ. Hopefully, Philemon would even allow Onesimus to return to Paul to freely care for him – since he was old and under house arrest.

In the Old Testament reading, the very young King Solomon is praying for wisdom. He reflects upon how difficult it is to understand the world – and even life, itself. Our best laid plans often come to nothing – Our physical body can burden our soul and spirit – Moreover, there is no way that we can know or understand the plan of God and its surprises for us.

Nevertheless, God can give us His Wisdom – God can give us the Holy Spirit – And if we live in that Wisdom and Holy Spirit – we will remain steadfast on the path that will, ultimately, take us to God!

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus is the Wisdom of God in human form. Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus calls us to love him and to follow him. He asks us to always keep him first – no matter how difficult life's choices will turn out to be. But he promises us the Kingdom if we always choose in his favor.

May God give us the grace and the courage always to do so!

Amen.

September 4, 2022

Msgr. Russell G. Terra