

The reading contains most of the letter that Paul sent to Philemon asking that he receive back in love the runaway slave Onesimus, who was voluntarily returning to him. Other information indicates that Philemon and Onesimus came from the community of the Colossians. Paul himself is now in prison, perhaps in Rome. Onesimus means “the useful one,” and Paul describes him as a man who has now become very useful. Evidently he had recently been converted to Christ. Paul does not speak against the institution of slavery, but tells Philemon that his relationship with Onesimus is changed now that they are brothers in Christ.

Hear now these words from Paul’s letter to Philemon.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker - also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier - and to the church that meets in your home:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul - an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus - that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him - who is my very heart - back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever - no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back - not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Luke 14:25-33

In our gospel Jesus speaks of the necessity of counting the full cost of discipleship. To follow Jesus in the way of the cross means to surrender the whole of one's life. Any relationship which interferes with this primary commitment must be hated. Jesus tells the crowds two stories to make them consider carefully whether they are ready and able to follow him completely.

Hear now these words from the gospel of Luke.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

This is the gospel message of our Lord and Savior. **May the reading and the hearing of Your word inform our minds, comfort our souls, and guide our feet.**