

Twenty-Third Sunday of the Year – September 8, 2019

Wisdom 9:13-18bb Philemon 9-10, 12-17 Luke 14:25-33

The journey we are on with Jesus, as it has been described by Saint Luke over the last few weeks, started with the statement by Jesus encouraging his listeners to take up the cross and follow him. Various aspects of what that would mean have been presented to us from the Gospel passages we have heard.

Today we are presented with a specific description of what this involves. In a very radical manner we are challenged with the understanding that nothing, not even family itself, is to interfere or to hinder this response and the relationship with God that is involved. It is a difficult, even puzzling, statement that Jesus makes. To take up the cross, to be united to God through Jesus requires a commitment even more significant than a family relationship. It is a commitment that is so valuable that it involves an effort equal to that which Jesus is willing to undertake – giving of himself by his death on a cross. It is a commitment that is so thorough that what must be done is similar, in a way, to building a tower or going into battle.



Along with these words of Jesus, other insights are offered to us by St. Paul and the author of the Book of Wisdom. Paul writes an early Christian covert about returning a runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become valuable to Paul. He was willing to return him to the rightful

owner, Philemon, but reminds him that their common faith in Jesus Christ had fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship that was to exist. The relationship with God through Christ superseded the requirements of the law or the expectations of the society in which they were living.

The author of the Book of Wisdom uses eloquent language to convey a similar thought. He reminds us how limited and restricted is our way of thinking as human beings when compared to God's way of thinking. God's ways, God's Spirit, is not limited by human judgements, prejudices, distinctions or qualifications.

The challenge put before us by Christ, and as it is reflected in these other sources, requires some consideration and thought by us. Do we want to be whole-hearted followers of Jesus? Do we want to live out our potential as reflections of God? Do we want to be, literally, joined with Christ in carrying the cross, in abandoning everything so as to reveal the presence of God in our lives and in the world in which we live?

If so, then we must be willing to separate ourselves from anything that limits or hinders us. All of this sounds like a

great demand. But we would do well to consider this also. If we were detached from prejudices or grudges that we harbor, if we were detached from so many things that cause us anxiety, if we were detached from so many objects that we think we need, if we were detached from dependencies we have created for ourselves on persons, possessions, substances and the like, the result would be an exhilarating freedom. It would gain for us a freedom of mind, heart and spirit, a freedom of truly reflecting in our lives the loving presence of our good and gracious God.