

# Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

## September 8, 2019

The 1st Reading today from the Book of Wisdom, is part of Solomon's prayer for wisdom. He begins by acknowledging that God is the creator of the whole universe. All wisdom resides in God, alone. As human beings, we tend not to be wise because we are prone to become self-reliant. He says: "For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans." He goes on to make an extremely important statement: "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."

How awesome is that from Solomon! It is something we have regularly repeated. It is consistently in the teaching of Jesus, right up to the end of His life on Earth. It is pretty clear in today's Gospel. — Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He knew full well what lay ahead of Him; suffering, rejection and death. He was also very aware that His disciples were not attuned to this, though He had spoken of it many times. Some of the Galileans were looking at this journey to Jerusalem as some kind of a 'victory march' of the Messiah. In no uncertain terms, Jesus chose to address their disillusionment. Knowing that His disciples would have to face similar challenges, Jesus chose to speak about "The Cost of Discipleship." What is really involved in being a disciple.

In two weeks time, we will reconvene our Small Group Study, and enter into a marvelous experience on this topic: "Walking the Disciples' Path." A wonderful journey that will provide us a really unique view into this Gospel, and Jesus' invitation to understand the cost of Discipleship. If you have not already signed up to be in a Small Group, I encourage you to do so, real soon. You may call the office and speak to Kelly or Sarah, and they will be happy to guide you should you have any questions.

As we delve into the Gospel for today, we can initially be very shocked by Jesus' Presentation on discipleship. "If anyone comes to me without hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Now if one were to read that literally, who would want to be a disciple of such a God? This is why we cannot take a purely literalist approach to understanding the scriptures. We must look for the full and deeper meaning of what is being presented to us!

The word "hate" is a Semitic expression. What Jesus was really saying is: If you want to live life to the full, if you wish to love to the full, and be loved to the fullest extent, then it all begins with me ..... becoming aware of how much I LOVE YOU ..... He was telling His disciples, and all would-be disciples, if you really want to be a disciple of mine, then it begins with an awareness of how much I love you, how much

I desire for you, and I will give you what you need to be a disciple who bears much fruit. Jesus was not hiding the challenges, the difficulties, the hardships, of discipleship and the sacrifices that would be required of those who would follow Him. He told them in no uncertain terms that it wouldn't be easy. He could not have laid it out more clearly. And in so doing, He removed any possibility that we could later complain, "Oh we never thought it was going to be this difficult."

He told His disciples that they must be ready if needs be to sacrifice the dearest things in life. In certain circumstances (maybe rare) they might have to choose between Him and their own relatives. Certainly not a part of the Gospel that we are inclined to cherish, but at the same time we know it to be an absolute truth in our world. The questions and issues of faith, and religion, and practice thereof, are still some of the most contentious in our world.

Jesus tells two short parables to illustrate His message on discipleship. The choice of discipleship is a very serious calling. It could mean persecution and even death. In this, as in many other vocations in life, such as business, or politics, one should not walk blindly into it. One is invited to calculate the cost of discipleship before setting out on the journey. Jesus says, in following Him there is a place for common sense, for prudence, for counting up the cost, for discernment to see if one has what it takes. The most important thing in setting out on this journey is self-knowledge. We are not supposed to take on more than we are capable of. We may indeed overestimate or underestimate, ourselves. And sometimes, we might need a great challenge to bring out the best in us.

The Gospels are a source of great encouragement for us if we observe carefully. The Gospels show that His disciples struggled at every point to follow Him, yet He did not write them off. He constantly was patient and merciful with them. And it is clear that they learned from their mistakes. It was really only after His Death and Resurrection that they became His true followers. And, each one of us knows how that came about ..... It was through the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit, as indicated in the 1st Reading and the Gospel. Let us continue to pray for an outpouring of that same Holy Spirit in our own lives.

— Fr. Gerry Hurley