

**This Sunday's Readings – the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time** – The theme of today's readings is not just wisdom, but the difference between conventional wisdom and divine wisdom.

The first reading is from the Book of Wisdom. This book was written about a hundred years or less before Christ. It is part of the Deuterocanonical Books of the Bible. Even though the author is unknown, it is known that he came from Alexandria, Egypt, and had an excellent knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as Greek culture. The book was written in Greek and came at a time of persecution not only from the outside but also by apostate Jews. The St. Charles Borromeo Bible Study of Picayune, MS, adds this additional comment on the Book of Wisdom – “Perhaps the single-most important contribution of the book consists on its reflections on Wisdom, and especially the personification of Wisdom as God's agent in the world, yet sharing intimately in His nature. The ground is prepared for the understanding of Jesus as the incarnate Wisdom of God”. In this first reading from chapter 9, we see the difference between God's divine wisdom and our conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom is not only burdened by our mortal bodies but also by external concerns. Divine wisdom does not have those impediments and therefore is beyond our understanding. As the author of Wisdom asks – “Who can know God's counsel?”. Reginald H. Fuller in his *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* adds this comment on this reading – “While verse 15 recalls Plato's *Phaedo*, the author does not teach a non-biblical dualism of body/soul. The body is a hindrance to the knowledge of God's will, not the seat of evil. It is its finite, not evil, character that is its drawback. Only God's Spirit, or wisdom, enables us to transcend that finitude”.

In today's Gospel reading from Luke, we see what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. Many of these sayings are unique only to Luke. Jesus does not mince words here. To be a disciple one must turn one's back on the world and be totally committed to God. Reginald H. Fuller in his *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* adds this comment on the use of the word “hate” in verse 26 – ““Hate” (v. 26) is harsh. It has been suggested that the original Aramaic meant simply “love less than.” But this in turn is probably too weak. The real meaning is that following Jesus means the surrender of the whole of one's life”. One must also carefully plan and know what they are getting into, regardless of what conventional wisdom might say. Unlike many great leaders, Jesus is more concerned about His followers than by how many followers He has. He makes it quite clear that being a disciple is very difficult. This is not a part time job. It is a lifelong job that is never ending. Fr. Francis X. Cleary in his 2001 article for the *St. Louis Reviewonline* adds this comment on this Gospel reading – “In both parables (Gospel) Jesus teaches us that the future is obviously more real than an evanescent present. The story about a farmer building a guard-tower reminds us that we should “first sit down and calculate the costs” of discipleship. Do we really want to get involved? The second, about a king threatened by an invading superior force, challenges us with the life-and-death question. Can we really afford to ignore Jesus' call to follow him?”

John J. Pilch in his *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle C* adds these comments on today's Gospel reading – “On the face of it, Jesus seems to propose three

devastating and inhuman requirements for becoming his disciple: hate one's family (v. 25); carry the cross (v. 26); give up all possessions (v. 33) – even though “half” sufficed for Zacchaeus in 19:8). As usual, the literary context and a culturally appropriate reading scenario help us “foreigners” to better understand our strange-sounding ancestors in the faith.

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

Jesus has been invited for a meal at the home of a leading Pharisee (Luke 14:1). The cultural world of Jesus required that people—especially the elite—“eat with their own kind, within their own class.” The fact that Jesus is often a guest of Pharisees has led some scholars to suggest that Jesus himself was a Pharisee. Whatever the case, he never failed to challenge their beliefs and practices in the interest of offering better alternatives.

#### HATING ONE'S FAMILY

It is this Middle-Eastern understanding of “meals” that helps a “foreigner” to understand Jesus' comments on discipleship in today's reading. A follower of Jesus who ceased “networking” by means of meals would jeopardize a family's very existence. The disciple must then choose between allegiance to the family and allegiance to Jesus. Choosing Jesus is thus equivalent to letting one's family go, “hating” the family. Hate is more suitably translated “prefer,” that is, one who “hates” family actually prefers another group to the family. Recall the tight-knit nature of the Middle-Eastern family. The ideal marriage partner is a first cousin. Sons, married and single, remain with the father. Everyone “controls” one another. Life in these circumstances can be very stifling, very suffocating. Following Jesus and joining a new, fictive family would be very liberating and exhilarating.

#### CARRYING THE CROSS

There is, of course, a price to pay for such freedom. In the Middle East, the main rule of behavior is: family first! A disciple who deliberately cuts ties with family and social network will lose the ordinary means of making a living. This is the “economic cross” the disciple has chosen to carry. True, by joining a new, fictive family consisting of other disciples of Jesus, a “family-hating” person presumably has a new source of livelihood. No longer able to make claims to a livelihood based on blood ties and advantageous social network, members of this new fictive family have to rely on “hospitality,” which in the Middle East is extended exclusively by strangers to strangers (see Luke 9:4-5; 10:3-12). This risk-filled option is quite a cross to carry.

#### GIVE UP ALL POSSESSIONS

Clearly, a disciple who has accepted these challenging exhortations will effectively have given up everything. Therefore, a would-be disciple must seriously calculate the costs. Two brief parables (about construction and waging war) drive this point home. Anyone who weakens and abandons this determination will become the butt of ridicule and shame. A disciple must remain firmly committed. The behavior Jesus proposes is liberating and heroic but costly. Jesus' attitude toward family values give his followers much to think about. Contemporary believers are challenged to reflect upon the meaning

of “family values” in the ancient Mediterranean world and whether it is possible to import them into other contemporary cultures”.

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For the expanded article, go to <http://stjulies.org/A Archive READINGS.htm>