

September 8, 2019

Wis 9:13-18b; Phy 12:9-10,12-17; Lk 14:25-33

Jesus says something pretty unsettling today: *If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* Is he saying that you need to give up attention to family life as some people do for success in the world? Is Jesus saying that to be his disciple you need to despise your family, forget about family love and responsibilities, give up a happy life, and leave your family to do some radical form of discipleship like become a missionary in a foreign land? - no, not at all. To understand what he is getting at we have to first look at what it actually means to be a disciple, then look at the deeper meaning of Jesus' words - a meaning behind his forceful statement.

First we have to realize that Jesus is calling us all to discipleship. To be a disciple is to be a student - more specifically a student who learns by doing. It is like the relationship of apprentice to Master in the trades. There is a great wisdom that God holds out to us that we must learn and we can't figure it out on our own - but we may think we can. The greatest lessons of life are not learned simply because you decided to learn it on your own and decided to judge yourself what will be the best way to learn. The most profound lessons of life are often learned by events we had no control of, in situations we did not plan on, in lessons we did not write for ourselves. This is the path of discipleship. To learn the great mysteries of God, to gain insight into God plan, and to follow God in our Lord Jesus Christ to that final end God has prepared for all of us. But to learn you don't tell the master tradesman what techniques to use - you enter into a position of humble learning and do what is call on so that you learn those things that you don't even know that you don't know. We heard in the first reading: *Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? ... What is within our grasp we find with difficulty; but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?*

You wouldn't think that you could be an engineer because as a teenager you built a popsicle stick bridge - you don't go to engineering school; and say "well I really don't want to do all that math and other hard stuff, I pretty much know all there is to know." But I have seen people think that after sixth grade religion class they have hit the depths of all there is to know about God. To be the disciple involves lifelong learning, and doing some of the work of learning that we would rather skip. The path that Jesus calls us to is not always easy (although it is filled

with rewards), and he does not shy away from telling us that. He tells us that *Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple*. There is a sacrifice involved, there're things that need to be given up. We all want to get the rewards that come at the end of the game, but somehow expect that we will not have to put in sacrifice. But there really is no reward without sacrifice; there is no winning the game without a lot of practice, dedication, sweat, and tears; there is no participating in the resurrection without participating in the cross.

But does this mean that to be disciples we have to actively hate our families as Jesus says today? You really have to understand the language of the time. Jesus sometimes uses exaggeration to make a point - we do this all the time. When you are frustrated and say "why don't you just shoot me!" that is not literally what you mean, and everyone in our time know is. In the context of Jesus' statement today and in his time, the word "hating" also meant "turning away from," not a total abandonment, but turning away from too much focus. In his time, they would have understood this. Jesus means that unless a person turns to some degree away from the excessive demands of family - especially those unnecessary demands that we create for ourselves - unless one frees oneself from the constant pressure of their own pursuits in life, they cannot be a disciple. God must come first - not squeezed in if you get time. You also have to understand Jesus' words in the context of other things he says. Jesus affirms all the biblical requirements of respect to family, and he gets angry with the Pharisees who found a loophole to allow them to not care for their elderly parents - no - Jesus does not mean to hate them as it first seems, we must love and care for them - just not put them in a higher place than following God.

The point he is trying to make is that this is serious business, we need to commit to the project of discipleship, which involves understanding who God is and learning the true path. In the Gospel Jesus speaks about the general facing a battle. He says the general has to consider if he can defeat a larger army. These statements echo many battles in the Old Testament where the smaller force triumphed over the larger because God was fighting for them. What the general, and we, really have to consider is not how many soldiers there are, not our personal resources, but if God is with us. The path of learning the complex wisdom of God, and following Jesus in discipleship places God in our midst. Then as we go out to fight the many battles of life we don't do it alone. We are armed by the wisdom of God which we can't get on our own, and as disciples we are following Jesus' lead to victory. The path of discipleship is the path to true understanding, to ultimate purpose in life, and to eternal happiness. Come learn from the Master.