

## 23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Wisdom 9: 13-18b + Psalm 90: 3-6, 12-17 + Philemon 9-10, 12-17 + Luke 14: 24-33

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: September 8, 2019

Paul's letter to Philemon is the shortest book in the Bible.

In this very brief letter, Paul encourages Philemon to embrace the dream of Jesus, to live as a member of the kingdom of God.

Onesimus is Philemon's possession---he is a slave of Philemon.

Onesimus ran away from his master, encountered Paul, became a Christian and then a helper to Paul during his imprisonment.

Paul calls the runaway slave "my child" and "my own heart" and challenges Philemon to receive Onesimus as if he were Paul himself.

So, Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master, Philemon, as more than a slave---as his brother in Christ Jesus.

Philemon lives in Colossae and is a member of the Christian community Paul has established in that Greek city.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, Philemon and the other Christians in Colossae hear more about this dream of God for humanity Christ Jesus:

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all in all."* (3: 11)

Jesus Christ breaks down the barriers between God and humankind, and also the walls human beings build between each other.

By preferring Christ above everything else, by making one's relationship with Jesus Christ the top priority in one's life, one discovers with St. Paul that there are no longer distinctions that divide us, but Christ is all in all.

In Christ, our family expands beyond our nuclear family to include the family of humankind.

The relationships of love we have with our own particular family members are meant to strengthen us to love of others as our own brothers and sisters, to include in "our family" the Christ who lives in the refugee and immigrant, the hungry and homeless, the vulnerable and voiceless ones.

In order to live from our identity as adopted sons and daughters of our Father and brothers and sisters to the Son of God, we have to renounce and reorder. Living the dream of Jesus, bringing the Kingdom of God to earth, means renouncing the hold that other things have on our life in order to prefer Him above all things.

That's the meaning of the powerful phrase of Jesus, you cannot be my disciple without hating father and mother, wife and children....

That Semitic expression Jesus uses with the word "hate" means in our terms, "love less." In other words, we are to love Jesus first and foremost and then all the other "loves" of our life fall into place, into proper order.

Renouncing possessions means there is no-thing which can take the privileged place of God in our life.

No-thing can be made into an absolute, because when this happens, we become enslaved to it.

When our relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing in our life, we experience more freedom.

When we are living out the dream of Jesus for a world where all people live as sisters and brothers, then we see that our possessions are given to us to share with others, especially those in most need.

What we have been given by God is more than just material things but also time--- 1440 minutes each day.

How we spend our time says something about our relationship to Jesus and our desire to further the Kingdom he establishes.

What we give our time to speaks volumes about what holds importance in our life.

Renouncing the stranglehold that possessions can have on our life is one way to renounce our life, to prefer a grander and greater and more expansive life in Christ over the small, self-contained, self-centered life.

To "hate" our life means rejecting the demands of our "ego", means rejecting the temptation to live life with a small "I".

To prefer Jesus Christ, to make him the center of our life, means living life spelled with a capital "L".

In Him, we discover abundant life, a life which takes us out to others.

A life spent pursuing God's dream for us after the example of Christ brings meaning to our life and gives our life eternal consequence.

Preferring Jesus Christ over family relationships, above any thing we have, making him the center of our life and not our selfish, death-dealing desires---all of this naturally leads to taking up our cross. Because as we follow Jesus along the way to Jerusalem, we are going to the cross with him. After all, the cross is his destiny and ours.

Christian discipleship means following where he leads, and he leads us to the cross, the most powerful image of sacrificial, life-giving love.

Sacrificial love is the energy the sons and daughters of God bring to building towers which connect heaven to earth and opposing the forces that want to diminish the dignity of human life. Empowered by the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Lord, we can love sacrificially. We can enter into the battle with Christ Jesus to oppose the “isms” of our day-- consumerism, materialism, secularism, sexism, racism, nativism---and emerge victorious.

From the perspective of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and empowered by his Spirit, the sacrifices of discipleship look radically different from an ego-driven life. An ego-driven life--- a self-centered life—views discipleship as way to costly, as giving up “stuff” we need, and sacrifices as painful. In a Christ-centered life, sacrifice becomes the act of self-giving which makes life holy and fashions a future never seen before.

We all pay a price. There is a cost to every decision, to every action which demands our time, energy, attention, our very life. We are “spending” our life away each day, in minutes and hours we will never recapture.

We can spend our life being enslaved by the desire for more money and more stuff. We can spend our life focused on the small, death-dealing desires of the ego. We can spend our life pleasing others instead of God.

Or we can choose to spend our life following Christ Jesus as his disciples. To be worthy of Jesus we follow Jesus rather than follow the expectations of anyone else. Discipleship demands something of us--it is costly. It costs something of us, more than we can even imagine. But the reward is beyond our best and brightest and most glorious dreams.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi