

Homily of Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

Wisdom 9:13-18; Psalm 90:3-6, 12-17; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33

The first reading says, "For the deliberations of mortal are timid, and unsure are our plans. For the corruptible body burdens the soul and earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. ..." (Wisdom 9:15-16).

Today's first reading reminds us of the first reading of the 18th Sunday, "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Again, the Church invites us to reflect on the vainness, rootlessness, helplessness, restlessness, emptiness, unfulfilled-ness of human beings' pursuits of earthly possessions with no reference to God. We and the society remain burdened and weighed down by the pursuit of vanities. Our deliberations without God are timid (lack depth). We are restless until we rest in the Lord, says St. Augustine.

The second reading is St. Paul's letter to his friend, Philemon, who was a wealthy Christian leader. In the letter, he appealed to Philemon to reconcile with his slave, Onesimus, who escaped and ran to St. Paul. It is remarkable that St. Paul encouraged Philemon to welcome Onesimus and have him back "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother ... beloved in the Lord." Blessed are we when we no longer see people through the lens of race, color, ethnicity, religion, class, status, gender, and other classifications, but see one another as brothers or sisters. St. Paul states, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor there is male and female, for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

Some New Testament scholars maintain that Philemon welcomed St. Paul's appeal and indeed reconciled with Onesimus. The fact that this letter of St. Paul to Philemon survived is a testimony of the reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus. This reconciliation is a challenge to many of us who prefer to bear grudges and who prefer enmity than following the path of peace and reconciliation. Blessed are we when we forgive and reconcile. We remain burdened and weighed down by rejecting one another and by refusing to forgive and reconcile. Jesus says that the sins we retain are retained (John 20:23). The sins are retained in the one who refuses to forgive. Anyone who does not follow the path of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation like Philemon cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

In today's gospel Jesus addresses us, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife, and children, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ... Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, 33). Jesus does not literally mean that we hate anyone in order to be his disciple. He means that relationships and earthly possessions must not take the place of God in our lives. Always, God first! Carrying one's cross and following Jesus

means self-denial and self-surrendering to God's will. St. Cyprian of Carthage writes, "Prefer nothing to Christ, because he preferred nothing to us."

If we are burdened and weighed down by the pursuit of possessions and vanities, we cannot be Jesus' disciples. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. ... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Those who make their wealth by all kinds of foul means cannot be disciples of Jesus, even when they identify closely with the Church and with Christianity. On the Judgement Day, Jesus will say to such people, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers" (Matthew 7:23).

Jesus continues in today's gospel, "Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? ... Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide with a thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?" (Luke 14:28-33). When God plays a central role in our deliberations and our decisions, the Holy Spirit guides us to depth, to what is Godly, to what is Christian, to what is reasonable, to what is possible, to what is sustainable, and to what is God's will.

Remember the first reading of last Sunday, "My child, conduct your affairs with humility. ... What is sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not" (Sirach 3:17 & 21). Pride, lack of self-contentment, lack of self-acceptance, over ambition, greed, and covetousness have led many astray and ruined many lives. Unhealthy competitions and unhealthy comparisons have led many astray and ruined many lives. These vices corrupt the body, burden the soul, and weigh down the mind. Various crises, violence, wars, sufferings of the innocent in our society and in our world are due to these vices. These tragedies are due to the removal of God from our systems. We continue to pray for the repentance of those who bring these hardships upon our society and our world.

On our part, these vices lead us to make wrong and sinful choices. The vices prevent us from becoming true disciples of Jesus. We pray for the grace to free ourselves from the vices, have closer relationship with God, and be able to faithfully carry our crosses and follow him. Amen.

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