TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C
September 8, 2019

Wisdom 9:13-18b
Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17
Philemon 9-10, 12-17
Luke 14:25-33

Assembly

(An unlit candle, a Bible opened to this week’s gospel and a calculator rest on a cloth-covered table in the meeting place.)

Beginning Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to silently focus on God’s presence. After a short time of reflection, two members alternate reading the following prayer aloud.)

All: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

I: You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

All: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
II: You make an end of them in their sleep;  
the next morning they are like the changing grass,  
which at dawn springs up anew,  
but by evening wilts and fades.

All: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

I: Teach us to number our days aright,  
that we may gain wisdom of heart.  
Return, O LORD! How long?  
Have pity on your servants!

All: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

II: Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,  
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.  
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;  
prosper the work of our hands for us!  
Prosper the work of our hands!

All: In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17

LISTEN TO THE LORD

(The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. After the gospel is read, the leader invites members to choose a few words from the gospel that touch them.

The leader asks these two questions with a pause between them: “What does this gospel say to you?”, “How does this gospel affect you in your life?” The community silently reflects on these questions. The leader invites members to share their thoughts about the Insights and Reflection Questions for the week in a single group or within smaller groups.)

Insights

Most of the time when we are being recruited to join a cause we are given tempting offers that try to convince us to make a commitment in favor of that cause. For instance, the US military offers new recruits who sign
up; enticing incentives like cash bonuses, education and training, medical benefits, housing and relocation, family and child services, legal support, etc. Tech companies like Google, Amazon, Netflix and Adobe offer benefits like unlimited time off, up to a year paid leave to care for a newborn baby or elderly parent, free food, work-from-home options, etc. to lure desirable employees to work for them. When the incentives are persuasive enough, calculating the cost is a no-brainer.

However, some decisions are not so easy to evaluate. In this week’s gospel, Jesus instructs us to carefully calculate the costs of our decision to become his disciple. He tells us we must renounce everything else in our lives in order to be one. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means that we follow him and his teachings and minister to others. In order to follow him we must live like him. We all know how hard what he asks of us is. We have witnessed some of our own religious leaders, who once made vows to God in good conscience, fail at their vocations. Why would we be any different? In our modern world temptations are hard to ignore when they are constantly splashed across our television screen, computer screen or in the pages of magazines. Advertisements are meant to lure us in and they can be very successful.

Jesus’ arguments to join him as a disciple, renouncing many aspects of our lives, may seem less than persuasive to many of us. In fact, on the surface, he gives a better argument of why not to become a disciple of Jesus. We may ask ourselves, “What are the incentives Jesus offers to offset the demands of the job?”

Besides the biggest incentive, gaining entry to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus offers us his presence in our lives. He offers us his love, his support, his comradery, his on-demand self. He won’t desert us during the difficult times in our life; like when we are sick, poor, grieving, betrayed or abandoned. He will reside in us if we let him; he will be there for us always. A life without Jesus in our hearts can be a very dark and lonely place. Whether we are making a personal commitment or a religious vow, Jesus tells us to calculate the cost carefully.

**Reflection Questions**

- What obstacles does a person face in their quest to become a disciple of Jesus?
- What are some of the positive benefits of discipleship?
What factors do you consider important when calculating the costs of discipleship?

**Suggestions for Action**

- Offer your support to a priest, nun, deacon or other religious leader in your parish by helping them minister to believers and witness to non-believers.
- Give away something you hold dear to a deserving person in your community who has fewer resources than you have.
- Read *Thinking Like Jesus: The Psychology of a Faithful Disciple*, by Dr. Ray Guarendi.

**HEAR THE LORD**

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing, the leader poses these questions: “How has the sharing from this session affected you?”, “How will it change you this week?” The leader allows a moment for members to reflect before inviting them to share their thoughts. The leader reads a selection from the readings aloud. Following the reading, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What is Jesus saying to you?”, “What is your response?” The community pauses to reflect on these questions. A brief instrumental selection may be played during this time. After a time of reflection, the leader invites members to share what they hear Christ saying to them.)

**Closing Prayer**

(The leader plays the song "The Cost" found at www.insightsbooks.com. Click on the Music link and select the appropriate week. After the song is complete, members alternate reciting the following prayer.)

**Calculate the Costs**

I: Jesus called to me
   I eagerly listened
   When I heard what he asked of me
   My forehead glistened

II: I thought, ‘Could I commit?’
   While calculating the cost
   I struggled to answer
Before all was lost

I: What was I waiting for?
The invitation was clear
There could be no denying
There was nothing to fear

II: Jesus waited patiently
As I committed my soul
To be his disciple
I accepted the role

(Members exchange a sign of peace. The candle is extinguished.)