

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 4 September 2022

Scriptures: Wisdom 9:13-18; Philemon 9-17; Luke 14:25-33

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading, we are reminded that it is wisdom through the Holy Spirit that helps us discern the will of God in our lives.

In the second reading, we are confirmed in the teaching of Jesus that truly we are sisters and brothers equally in God's family, and not slaves.

The Gospel reading presents us with a challenge. At the heart of it all is the need for what we might call coherence. We are called by Jesus to choose the right path, to develop the skills to make sure that what begins as an idea in the mind, finds fulfillment in the real world.

Whether we are thinking of the arts or the sciences, that very choosing of the right road is the important complement to all the hard work that then follows.

Among the themes that St. Luke explores in his Gospel, two that contrast are his emphasis on compassion and forgiveness, and the uncompromising demands that Jesus makes of his disciples. As Jesus says quite bluntly, if we are not able to carry our cross and come after him, we cannot be his disciples.

The two stories that follow helps us to understand this saying. Jesus takes the example of two people faced with difficult decisions. First, someone is building a tower. If he fails to budget for his building plans satisfactorily, he will end up a laughing stock, as he will have an edifice that is only half built. The other example is that of a king making up his mind whether to take on an adversary with twice the number of soldiers at his command. If he cannot work out in advance whether he can win with his

smaller numbers, then he needs to negotiate for peace in advance.

In both cases we have people calculating wisely what they need to do to achieve a satisfactory outcome in their planning. For his followers, Jesus says, this preparatory calculation lies in freeing themselves from any earthly attachments or possessions. If we try to follow Jesus without this freedom of mind and heart, these attachments will get in the way of our resolve. We will not have the right frame of mind to follow through our good intentions. It will be a case of that other well-known saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

Today we live in a world in which we have become very dependent upon material possessions, much more so than the people among whom Jesus lived. We could argue that this makes it all the more difficult for us to be his disciples. It will certainly be impossible for most of us to take his words literally and rid ourselves of all our human connections and material possessions. This, however, is not an end in itself.

It is to ensure that we are open to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that enables us to follow Christ. Freeing ourselves from our possessions clears the way for the Spirit to act in us freely and successfully.

We can test our own dependence on possessions by seeing how easily we let go of them. Could I cap the amount I spend on myself by giving away as much as I buy for myself? Could I choose to involve myself in an act of charity rather than go on a shopping spree? Could I spend some time with someone in need rather than with my friends? Such choices may seem insignificant but they are a way to reveal the strength of our attachments, and how far we are truly free to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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