

September 4, 2022
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, "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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

"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? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, 'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.'

"Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms.

"In the same way anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

Background:

Last week's gospel (Luke 14:1, 7-14) placed Jesus at table with a leading member of the Pharisees for a Sabbath meal. The custom of the day would have been to place the most honored guests at the right and the left of the host. But all at the table would have been people of similar status. Jesus challenged those attending the meal to rethink how to gain honor. That text concluded with the reassuring statement that all will be "repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:14)

Not included as part of last Sunday's gospel is a comment made by one of the other dinner guests: "Blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God." (Luke 14:15b) In response, Jesus tells another parable with the familiar theme of a great banquet. Many of the invited declined to attend, so the "poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame" were invited. (Luke 14:21d) Because there was still room, even the strangers along the road were invited.

Luke's gospel then describes Jesus addressing a great crowd that has been traveling with him, which is the text for this week's gospel. But Luke will return to the image of a great banquet next week when Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son.

As Jesus addresses the crowd in this week's gospel, his focus is on those who might consider becoming one of his disciples. In what may be startling language, he describes three qualities: the ability to put their relationship to Jesus above other relationships, acceptance of the cross, and letting go of possessions. In a cultural world where one's relationship with family and community determined every aspect of life including even survival, making one's relationship with Jesus the first and primary relationship carried significant repercussions. Jesus' commitment to his mission meant a willingness to accept suffering and death. His followers needed to be aware that their commitment could require them to experience suffering and rejection also. Lastly, Jesus' disciples must be willing to let go of their possessions as faithful disciples. This is not a new requirement, but it follows for the others.

Jesus is speaking to the crowds here, not to his disciples. Especially from the two short parables, one gets the sense that he is addressing those in the crowd who are contemplating becoming his disciples. He wants them to know the significance of the decision before them, and not make it without careful consideration.

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you recall a situation when found yourself wishing that you knew more fully what getting involved in a project was really going to involve?

2. Who have been the people who have mentored and guided you through some of the important decisions you have had to make?
3. During difficult or important decisions, were there also voices of advice that were not truly helpful? Can you identify any common qualities about their motives or the advice they tried to offer?
4. Do you have any heroes among those who have stood up for what they believed to be right in difficult situations?
5. What are some of the things you have had to “leave behind” or “let go of” in order to do what you needed to do as a disciple of Jesus?
6. What does it say to you that Jesus wanted those who were considering discipleship to consider the consequences of their actions?
7. Can you share honestly and openly with God your feelings about trying to live as a disciple of Jesus, or some other aspect of today’s gospel that is important to you?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for September 4, 2022, the Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Who can know God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?
 For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans. The corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. And scarce do we guess the things on earth, and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty; but when things are in heaven, who can search them out? Who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?
 And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.

In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
 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. 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.
 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.
 Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!
 Fill us at daybreak with your kindness that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
 May the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us!

I, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus, urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment; I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary. Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, "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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, 'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.' Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

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

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for September 4th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Luke, Jesus has strong words about what it takes to be his disciple. He is looking for full commitment. At the beginning, he says his disciples must "hate" their parents, family, and even themselves. At the end, he says they must "renounce all their possessions." In the middle, he adds that they must "carry their cross and come after me." In parables, he contrasts this with starting to build a tower without a clear enough plan to know it can be completed, or to marching into battle with only half the men as the enemy, without first considering whether they can succeed.

The other readings also have references to how things are different with God than with humans. In the first reading from Wisdom, we are asked, "Who can conceive what the Lord intends? The mind is weighed down with many concerns, and scarce do we guess the things on earth. When things are in heaven, who can search them out? Who ever knew your counsel, O God, except when you had given wisdom, and sent your Holy Spirit from on high?" Psalm 90 acknowledges, "A thousand years in your sight are as yesterday. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O Lord! How long? May the gracious care of our God be ours!" In the second reading, from the letter to Philemon, Paul writes, "I am sending Onesimus back to you. I should have liked him to serve me in my imprisonment for the gospel, but you might have him back, as more than a slave but a brother in the Lord. Welcome him as you would me."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!