

September 7, 2025
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. All those at the table would have been people of similar status. Jesus challenged those attending to rethink that practice and 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 a parable with the familiar theme—a great banquet. Many of those invited declined to attend, so the "poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21d) were invited. Because there was still room, even the strangers along the road were invited.

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

Jesus' address to the crowds in this gospel seems to focus on those considering becoming disciples. In what may be startling language he describes three qualities he requires: the ability to put their relationship with Jesus above other relationships, acceptance of their own cross, and letting go of possessions. In a cultural world where one's relationship with family and community determines every aspect of one's life, even survival, making one's relationship with Jesus primary carries significant repercussions. Jesus' commitment to his mission produces a willingness to accept suffering and death. His followers need 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 follows for the others.

Discussion Questions

1. Who would you include among your most important relationships?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to let go of an important relationship? Why? What do you remember about that situation?
3. Have you ever wished you were more fully aware of what you were getting into (with an organization, task, or relationship)?
4. Who have been the honest voices of wisdom in your life?
5. Who are your heroes who have been true to their values even in difficult situations?

6. What are some of the things you have left behind or let go of in your journey as a disciple of Jesus?
7. What does it say to you that Jesus wanted those who were considering discipleship to consider the consequences of their actions?
8. 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 7, 2025, 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

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for September 7th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Luke, Jesus advises the crowd to consider what is required of someone, to be a disciple of his. He likens this to considering the cost compared to one's resources before starting to build a tower, or before going into battle. "Otherwise the onlookers would laugh at him, 'This one began what he could not finish.' Anyone who does not renounce all his possessions, and who does not carry his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

The other readings also have references to God's intent being beyond our understanding, and we desiring wisdom, but God's ways being different, like a slave becoming a brother. In the first reading from Wisdom, we hear: "Who can conceive what the Lord intends? Scarce do we guess the things on earth, but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?" Psalm 90 exclaims, "For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, or as a watch of the night. The next morning they are like the changing grass, which at dawn springs up anew." In the second reading, Paul writes to Philemon: "I am sending Onesimus back to you, no longer as a slave, but a brother, beloved as a man and in the Lord. Welcome him as you would me."

When the national news is that a community of innocent Catholics, mostly children, is targeted in a mass shooting, it is no wonder that many, especially Catholics, question, why does God allow this? It is essentially asking, why does God allow people to act of their own free will? Wisdom responds, "The earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. and what is even within our grasp we understand only with difficulty. But things in heaven, who can search them out? Who ever knew your counsel, God? Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what you, Lord, intend, except when you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? Thus are the paths of those on earth made straight." And Jesus in the gospel then tells us, "Anyone who does not renounce all his family and possessions, and who does not carry his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." This is Jesus telling us to choose after thinking about it for ourselves, "Do you have it within you to do this?"

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