

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C

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

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a Bible open to this week's gospel and a crucifix rest on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader calls the community to silent attention to the presence of God. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: I will rise and go to my Father

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

Leader: 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: I will rise and go to my Father.

Leader: 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: I will rise and go to my father. Amen!

Psalm 90:12-17

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

Reflection

This week's gospel is one of the most jolting in scripture. On its face, Jesus is telling the crowds that to be his disciple they must hate their families and give away all their possessions. He is saying to all of us that there are consequences to discipleship and we are to own our choice. It sounds so harsh, and this from the Jesus from whom we learn that God is love. What is going on here?

No one knows the path one's life's journey will take. We make so many plans. We plan for our schooling. We choose our work, our partners. We make plans for family. We plan for retirement. We act like we are in charge of it all. Then life takes over. And life can be so unpredictable.

We are taught a sense of God as children. As we get older, we are challenged to make faith our own. Sometimes we behave like we can bargain with God. When God does not answer prayers as we wish, we may distance ourselves from God.

It is Jesus who sets the terms of discipleship in this gospel. We are not in charge. There is a cost to discipleship. That cost is our acknowledgement of his ultimate claim on us. We are not our own. We are his. Jesus is inviting the disciples and all of us to a new relationship with God. He calls us beyond a childlike relationship. We are called to carry our cross. That means dying and rising into the ultimacy of God's love in and through whatever we think

our plans may be. Our God is a jealous God who calls us to be rooted in his love as our life's ultimate concern.

Some years ago a friend's nineteen year old son was killed several blocks from the house by a driver high on drugs. She was waiting that night for her son to come home and she was in prayer when the door bell rang and was told the devastating news. She raced to the hospital and begged God for a miracle to save him. After all, Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you." Where was God? She was a woman of faith, however, and over the next months, she began to realize more and more clearly that God is present in all things. Whatever her plans for herself and her son, she understood her life belonged to God as did her son's life. In living and dying, they were both God's beloved.

All of the events on life's journey, however unpredictable, are invitations to the acceptance of discipleship, especially when they call upon us to carry our cross.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ When has discipleship called you to distance yourself from the expectations of family/friends?
- ◆ What do you understand as the cost of discipleship for you?
- ◆ When has being a disciple meant carrying a cross for you?
- ◆ What does being a disciple call you to renounce?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response In Action Suggestions

- ◆ Explore for yourself the possibilities offered to you by the practice of the daily examen proposed by St. Ignatius (www.ignatianspirituality.com/)

ignatian-prayer/the-exam).

- ◆ Set aside ten minutes each day this week for reflection and prayer. Ponder this week's gospel and ask yourself, "How do Jesus' words in this gospel challenge you?"
- ◆ Discipleship calls us to care for the environment. Green America is a national, not-for-profit, membership organization founded to harness economic power—the strength of consumers, investors, businesses, and the marketplace—to create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society. Go to www.greenamerica.org to get engaged with this mission.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the leader provides a copy of the lyrics to a familiar hymn. Members join in singing.

When the song is complete, the leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, members respond: "Help me carry my cross as your faithful disciple, O Lord."

When these prayers are complete, members join hands to pray the Lord's Prayer.

The session concludes with members exchanging a sign of peace.)