

“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. Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” Words from our Gospel today from the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

We’re pretty good at recognizing a bargain when we see one. We’ve been trained to get more for less, buy low and sell high, and check out prices online and between stores. Days like Amazon Prime Day, Black Friday, and Cyber Monday are popular shopping days to get good deals. Can you imagine, in a couple of months, all that leftover Halloween candy will be available for sale when trick or treating is over! Although the Housing and Vehicle Market are crazy right now, usually around Labor Day generally would have been good time to buy a car when the new 2026 vehicles are in because you can find a sale on the already “old” 2025 editions that need to be moved off the lots. We even have TV shows where people appraise different antiques and junk items like Sanford and Sons or Auction Hunters: Pawn Shop Edition. We are good at recognizing value.

Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus went around making his sales pitch for the Kingdom of God. “The Kingdom is like a fine pearl or a treasure buried in a field. So desirable, so valuable is the Kingdom of God that anyone would give everything that he or she had so as to obtain such a pearl, such a share in God’s Kingdom,” Jesus would say, along with many other similar parables about how great the Kingdom of God was. Jesus would then reinforce his message with miracles and signs that indeed proved what he was talking about, casting out demons, curing the sick, feeding thousands, letting the oppressed go free. But he was also incredibly up front in his sales pitch. There’s no fine print with Jesus. Just to be sure people knew what they were getting themselves into, he reminds his audience of the associated costs of discipleship and the implications of what it means to be a disciple. Because being a disciple is not a light decision, but one that affects every aspect of one’s life – everything must be subordinated to Christ, even the relationships one has with family and friends. And being a disciple is not an easy life for it requires commitment and perseverance, especially when challenges inevitably arise – we must take up our crosses; discipleship is not for romantics and idealists who have their head in the clouds because real grace doesn’t come cheap – we must be willing to renounce our possessions. The decision to follow Jesus was even more drastic in those early days of the Church when Christians were hunted down, and killed on account of their witness to Christ but even today, our secular world abhors Christianity; it’s not popular to be pro-life; it’s not popular to forgive; it’s not popular to espouse self-giving love and associate with a Church in need of healing and a social community when the culture increasingly values the self and self-created truths. But let’s examine the cost of discipleship and the three conditions of discipleship Jesus lays out for us in the Gospel today a little more closely.

The first condition is hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life. Please don't misunderstand Jesus. In this context, the idea of hate is better described as loving less. In other words, in our relationships, God must be loved more than anything else. Well, it turns out that loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength doesn't actually take away from our other relationships, it enhances them. For instance, we hear in our second reading about Onesimus who was a runaway slave, and St. Paul sends him back to his master Philemon. Yet, Paul was asking on account of the relationship that we all have in Christ, that Onesimus would be received back not as a slave but as a brother and be treated as such. If this is the case between different social classes, imagine how much more our relationships with those whom we do love will be transformed. In choosing to prioritize and love God as disciples, we are thus choosing to love our families in an even greater way.

The second condition of discipleship is that we must take up our cross and follow Christ. It happens that crosses come in many shapes and sizes. Maybe your cross is grief, addiction, shame, family strife, pride, depression, impurity, health, financial troubles... Consider that the cross of the ancient world was an instrument of torture meant to symbolize also scandal and shame. Crosses hurt and are painful. It is difficult to carry these burdens and reckon with the realities of life. And yet, the cross stands as a testament to the conquering love of God, demonstrating that there is nothing that he couldn't love us through, that a resurrection is held in store. As such, we ought to shoulder our own crosses with hope because the cross becomes the means of our transformation. Next week on September 14th, we celebrate as a Church feast of the triumph of the cross through which we obtain salvation.

Finally, the third condition of discipleship is the renunciation of possessions. Certainly, these can be material possessions, but Jesus talks about these in the same way that we talk about the successes of constructing a new building or achieving a victory against opposing forces. Our accomplishments on earth, we can't take those with us. Our pride dies with us too. As we sit down and calculate the costs of our various projects, we see that at the end of the day, none of our endeavors or possessions comes with us. We are not: what we have. God sees us as more than that. In renouncing these temporary things for the sake of Christ, we realize that with God, we will gain all things besides in his eternal kingdom.

So, what initially seemed like a harsh and difficult sales pitch to awaken us to the realities of life, reveals to us moreover that discipleship comes to us at a bargain. Relationships are messy, we all have crosses, none of us can hold onto our possessions forever. Yet seeing as how these are the costs of doing business, of living in this world anyway, we aren't giving up much on our part that we aren't already paying for anyway... what a Bargain! In giving our relationships, our struggles, and our possessions over to God, he transforms them into our very salvation. When we seriously consider these costs of discipleship, we see that the intangibles of life give way to something infinitely greater when we decide to invest in Christ.

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090725.cfm>

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 129

Reading 1

Wis 9:13-18b

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.
For 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?
Or 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.

Responsorial Psalm

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

R. (1) 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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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!

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

Reading 2

Phmn 9-10, 12-17

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.

Alleluia

Ps 119:135

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let your face shine upon your servant;
and teach me your laws.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Lk 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.”