

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
When Jesus is Our Choice...

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We call ourselves Pilgrims of Hope. This hope has a name. Hope is Jesus. So, we are Pilgrims of Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no hope, and this hope does not abandon us. If a person loses hope, it is not that hope has abandoned them. It is the person who no longer turns to Jesus or trusts in him. Jesus is the Wisdom of God. He is the means and goal to thrive in our pilgrimage of life.

Let us pray that our trust in Jesus grow deeper and deeper, stronger and stronger as Pilgrims of Hope.

This weekend, we heard one of Jesus' most challenging teachings. He tells us plainly, "Whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:27). This wisdom on carrying the cross is a wisdom about the person and life of Jesus. He completely entrusted himself to the will of the Father. His self-surrender, which ultimately led to the cross, was a free choice and offering of love to the Father for all of us sinners.

We see in the cross not just Jesus' suffering, but his love that refuses to die —a love that refuses to be silenced by evil, a love that refuses to be discouraged by insults and betrayals, a love that continues to love despite the cruelty of the world. It is this love that triumphed on the cross. We do not see the cross as a glorification of suffering, but rather as the triumph and power of love. Through the cross, we are victorious.

"Whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." These words of our Lord, while they are meant to strengthen us, are not easy words to hear. In fact, they can make us stop, think, reflect, and ask: "Am I ready to follow Jesus? Am I willing to renounce my riches? Am I willing to face the cost of discipleship?"

We live in a world where people often want the easy road—instant success, instant comfort, instant happiness, instant promotion, and instant marriage. But our Lord Jesus reminds us that the path of discipleship and holiness is different.

It is not about shortcuts. It is not about convenience. It is not about nicety. It is about choosing Jesus above all. It is about staying faithful even when it is difficult. It is choosing virtues—living over vices. It is about trusting that in the end, the reward is greater than anything the world can give. Of course, this may take time and, importantly, by the grace of God, but it starts with our choices.

We see this truth exemplified in the lives of saints such as St. Therese and two young individuals, St. Pier Giorgio Frassati and St. Carlo Acutis, who were canonized today at the ages of 23, 24, and 15, respectively. They did not seek power or fame; instead, they chose to live quietly and faithfully according to the values of the Gospel. The Church recognizes and honors them for their devotion and commitment to living out their faith in the world.

During what would be his final climb, St. Pier Giorgio wrote a simple note on a photograph: "Verso L'Alto," which translates to "to the heights." This phrase has since come to embody his passion for mountaineering and his perspective on life as a disciple of Jesus. To the heights — to the love of God! St. Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint, expressed before his death, "I die serene because I have not wasted even a minute of my life on things that God does not like." His words serve as a

reminder that time is precious. Every minute can either bring us closer to God or distance us from Him.

St. Carlo and Pio Giorgio didn't waste time on things that destroyed their souls, but on things that promoted the holiness of life, generously using their energy and riches to pray, help, and lovingly create opportunities for others.

Today, I invite you to reflect on God's wisdom regarding discipleship and the pursuit of holiness in life, which grows in our daily choices and decisions:

Choose Jesus Christ first. Jesus reminds us that nothing—whether possessions, pride, or comfort—should come before Him (cf. Luke 14:26, 33). To be His disciple means making Christ our top priority, which should be reflected in our daily choices and lifestyle. It would be a profound attitude if we woke up in the morning and texted Jesus first, rather than our friends. We need to allow Him to occupy and influence our thoughts from the very start of the day and to engage in conversation with Him first through prayer. If we choose Jesus first, we are choosing heaven, because Jesus is the way to heaven.

Choose to embody virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. Carrying the cross involves not just making significant sacrifices, but also making faithful choices every day, regardless of how small or seemingly inconsequential they may be. Like our patron, St. Therese, we should strive to be honest, forgive others, pray, and do what is right and holy, even when no one is watching.

Choose to sacrifice with love. True discipleship means giving up selfishness and pride, not because we are forced, but because love calls us to serve and help others, especially those who are in need. Sacrifice becomes meaningful and sacred when it is done with love. Love is eternal. We will not be friends of love in eternity if we don't befriend love here and now. We don't make sacrificial love wait; otherwise, love will say to us while knocking on the door of heaven, "Be gone, you are earthly, I don't know you" (cf. Matt. 7:21–23; Lk. 13:25–27; Matt. 25:1–13).

Choose to trust in God's promises, not the promises of the world. The crosses we carry can feel heavy — the problems and responsibilities in our families, the adversities we face, the downgrading remarks of others, and being misunderstood can be wearisome - but they are not forever. Our Lord Jesus carried His cross to bring us life, and He promises that if we walk with Him, we will find peace now and eternal joy in heaven (cf. Jn. 16:33; Psalm 16:11).

If we live to choose Christ first, to embody virtues, sacrifice with love, and trust in God's promises, we are on the way to heaven. If we choose Jesus, we choose hope. This hope that never abandons us but leads to heights we can never imagine reaching and accomplishing, like those of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, St. Pier Giorgio, and St. Carlo.

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor