

23rd Week of Ordinary Time 2025

Wisdom 9:13-18, Ps 89; Philemon 9-10.12-17; Luke 14:25-33

A few years ago, I was having a conversation with a gentleman who was returning to the Church after a number of years absence. During our chat he sat back in his chair and confided: 'Being a Catholic can be awfully hard work.' I understood what he meant. Being a good Catholic will test who we are, and who we wish to be, just as severely as today's Gospel attests. Luke's gospel is direct: his language is uncompromising:

'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'

If you are reading 'Bible Alive' this month it correctly observes that "*Jesus' teaching on discipleship is radical and shocking, We need to take him seriously but not literally.*"¹

If we were reading from a bible, we would see that today's text follows immediately after the parable Jesus tells about a man who sends out invitations to a great banquet he is having.² His invitations are met with refusals and excuses: one man has a new field to look after, another some new livestock, and another is recently married. They are, in short, pre-occupied. They refuse to accept the invitation they receive. I suppose for today's world the excuses would be football practice, having the shopping delivered, and work or study.

Again:

'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'

How can Jesus tell you not to love your mother or father, this would be contrary to the fourth commandment to 'honour your father and mother'. I think Jesus loved his own mother, so what does he mean?

'If any man comes to me...' does not mean someone who says merely says the words '*Jesus, Jesus*', it means someone who desires to align their lives with His. To carry one's 'own' cross' means to accept Christian discipleship, not just the idea of being Christian. Jesus uses two parables to illustrate this. Both parables have to do with commitment. To build a tower without having calculated the materials necessary to complete it is imprudent and witless. To embark on a military campaign without having weighed up the chances of victory is an act of supreme folly.

And there, I think, is the source of my friend's problem when he sees Catholic life as 'hard work'. The problem is that he was sat down; both physically and metaphorically. He was very nice, intelligent and engaging. Occasionally, he could move himself to come to Mass if he was not too busy otherwise. He could not, however, see his way to Confession, or Adoration, to say the Rosary, or go to a service during the week. I think he looked around and saw such things as 'work' or a diversion from other things he wanted to do. And in a way he was right.

¹ Bible *Alive* meditation for 7 Sept, 2025

² Luke 14:15-24

23rd Week of Ordinary Time 2025

During Mass there is that central moment at the Elevation, during which the priest raises the Body and Blood of Christ and offers them to the Father through the Holy Spirit

*Through Him and with Him and in Him,
O God, Almighty Father, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit
All Glory and Honour is yours,
For ever and ever.*

The Body of Christ lies on the bed of the Patten. The Blood of Christ is still in the bowl of the Chalice. 'Christ at rest' is, in fact, waiting for us to receive Him, so that we can act; and this means to act in love of the sacrifice we are about to receive. We become the Body of Christ, the arms, the legs, and the voice of heaven on earth, of the Crucified one who is Risen and sends his Holy Spirit upon us.

To be a Christian does not mean, in fact, that you hate your father, mother, wife, children, or even yourself. But it does mean that you prise yourself out of your easy chair, your familiar routine and even your worthwhile worldly duties, that you stand up and walk to Christ. The meditation in the aforementioned 'Bible Alive' continues:

"Of course, he does not want us to hate our parents or siblings, but we must not allow anyone, however close to us, to come in the way of serving him. If we are putting anyone else before Jesus, there is something wrong with that relationship"³

Sometimes it might appear to others that you love God more than them, and they might call this hatred. Sometimes this might mean that you appear to love God as much as He loves you, and they still might call this hatred. But in fact, you are loving God and your family, and your neighbour with the intensity and purity of Christ. And once you experience this, it is not hard work – or hatred - at all: it is loving work.

³ Bible *Alive* meditation for 7 Sept, 2025