

47 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C September 8, 2019
Wisdom 9:13-18 Psalm 90 Philemon 9-10,12-17 Luke 14:25-33

In today's Gospel Jesus is giving a chilling message, a warning to all of us, "*Whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.*" The Gospel begins with "*Large crowds were travelling with Jesus.*" But now, Jesus stops. He turns around and faces the crowds, not the rich, not the Scribes or Pharisees, but the crowds who have come along; however, He is also facing you and me.

Jesus says, "*Now, what about you? Are you ready to follow me? Are you willing to carry your cross?*" Jesus looks at them, and they look at Him. There is silence. And for some people here today, there is silence too. They don't say "*no*" and they don't say "*yes.*" For some people, that silence can last until it is too late.

Many people will follow Jesus but without a cross, without personal cost, without sacrifice. Yet, the cross is the cost of our discipleship with Jesus. It is where we show our fidelity, our loyalty to Christ. Like the crowds, we can be fans of Jesus. Our Lord has wonderful things to say, great stories, beautiful words that we can quote. But the call is not to quote Jesus but to follow Him, *to follow Him with our cross to His Cross.*

We all have some kind of a cross to bear in our life. It is obviously not a wooden cross like that of Calvary: however, it can be the cross of a family problem, an illness, aging, loneliness, spiritual emptiness or children leaving the Church. Perhaps our cross is to endure the pain involved in giving up our own slavery to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. Our cross may be to embrace the discipline we need to overcome gossip, to forgive someone who has injured us gravely, or to be kind and thoughtful toward someone who drives us crazy. It can be responsibilities we have or the cross of trying to be a family.

Every cross is unique. Our cross is like our fingerprint. No two are the same. People may have the same illness but the pain is experienced differently, uniquely, personally. Carrying our cross is our way, our unique and very personal way of showing our fidelity to Our Lord.

In today's Gospel, Jesus sets before us three crosses in order to be His faithful disciples. Jesus' teaching may seem radical, uninviting and hard to accept. However, Jesus is not interested in gaining a large following by softening His words and watering down the requirements needed to be His disciples, so He leaves His listeners under no

illusion about the cost of discipleship. These crosses are to leave your family, consider the cost, and let go of your possessions.

The first cross to be a true follower of Christ is a very heavy price to pay. A person must be ready to sacrifice one's family if it comes down to choosing between family and Christ. Today many family members continue to influence other family members from going to Sunday Mass and living out their faith. Turning one's back on the family and friends *does not mean denying them*. What it means is that if the family opposes the person who is wanting to follow Christ, then the person should try to choose Christ before their family.

What Jesus is teaching us is that our primary relationship is to be with Him. When we love Jesus above all other people or things, we are also freed to love our family and other people more fully and completely.

The second cross is to consider the cost of becoming a disciple of Christ. Jesus tells us two parables, the first about building a tower and the second about a king waging a war. The two parables help to emphasize the necessity of not acting on the spur of the moment or on impulse because the person must give careful consideration before making a decision to become a disciple of Christ. Jesus is not inviting people who want to be His disciples to follow in His footsteps for a day, a month, or even a year, but moment by moment for a lifetime.

To be Christ's disciple means we have to consider the cost. Knowing our human hearts as He does, however, means Christ knows that there will never be peace in those hearts, that we will never be truly happy until we follow Him as His disciples by following His ideas and His way of life.

The third cross refers to "whoever of you does not give up all their possessions cannot be my disciple." Jesus said, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Luke 12:34). At this moment, where is your heart? A person must choose between God and the materialistic world. God knows what a person needs. People are not asked or expected to give up their property or their possessions totally and entirely unless it prevents them from following Christ.

A certain amount of money and material possessions are still necessary if we are to live in this world. It is not how much we possess that does the damage, but it is our

attitude towards what we possess. When we have been given more possessions than what we need, then we are invited to share them generously with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need.

These are the crosses Christ presented to His would-be followers two thousand years ago and these crosses are still presented to us today. To encounter Christ and to find happiness on earth and in heaven is to work towards the goal of being His disciple. We are called to be His disciples in our families, in our place of work, in our parish, in our school, in our community, and in our world. In those moments when the struggles become too great to reach the goal, it is good to remember we are not alone. Christ is walking along every step of the way with us, helping us to carry our crosses.

Then there is another kind of cross we carry as a Church. That is the cross of handing on our Faith to the next generation. It is never easy. The culture around us has never made it easy. Yet, seed was sown that fell on good ground and produced the Catholic schools, religious education teachers, good Catholic parents of today and saints. It produced the people who come to our churches today. They took on the cross of transmitting the Faith and sowed the seeds that produced our congregation today.

Commenting and talking about the cross does not bring salvation. Carrying it as a faithful Catholic does. Each Mass is a chance to break the silence that follows Jesus' question about whether we are willing to carry our cross and follow Him. Each Mass is a chance to pick up our cross and carry it with Christ and for Christ.

The disciples will know the power and peace and glory of the new life that comes from carrying our cross with Christ, whatever that cross may be. The cross in our life traces that unique path by which we follow Our Lord. The cross is how we come to spiritual maturity here and to glory with Christ forever.

Today's Gospel may make us feel uncomfortable because our lives should demonstrate that we are carrying our cross. When the cross is absent from our lives then Christ is not present either. Putting God first in our lives and carrying our cross is a choice we must make every single moment of our lives.

The cross is part of everyone's life. We can either stare at our cross, complain about it, curse it, ignore it, deny it or follow Jesus by carrying our cross as faithfully as we can. Each of us has a cross; our generation has its cross; the Church in every age

has its cross. The cross we have can change us in a very personal way from a fan of Christ into a disciple of Christ. Which do you want to be, a fan or a disciple of Christ?

Are you willing to do what is necessary to live as a disciple of Christ? If so, willingly accept your cross in life and keep your eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. This may result in being rejected by others, including close friends and even family members. Pray to the Holy Spirit for the gift of endurance and perseverance. Those who are willing to pay the price of being Christ's disciple will find happiness, peace and joy on earth and at the end of life there will be a heavenly reward at the banquet table.