

Wisdom 9:13-18b

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

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Luke 14:25-33

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 4, 2022

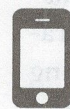


REFLECTION

Today's Gospel begins with a very startling statement from Jesus: If you don't hate your family and even your own life, you can't be his disciple. It must have been equally startling to the crowd following Jesus. He had attracted quite a large following thanks to his reputation as a miracle worker and a teacher. How many were caught up in the excitement? How many followed Christ out of curiosity, desire for healing, worldly self-interest, or revolutionary zeal? But Jesus' days as a crowd-pleaser were coming to an end, and he knew how ruthlessly his followers would be persecuted and tested. Maybe this is why he used such strong language to warn the crowd of the price of discipleship. During times of persecution, Christians have risked everything—family, possessions, homes, and lives—rather than deny the truth of the Gospel. With the martyrs, may we also have the strength to follow Christ whatever the cost.

ACTION

We rarely think of the modern Christian as an oppressed minority, but in many places around the world, Christians continue to face hostility for the faith. One report estimates that one out of every nine Christians worldwide experiences high levels of persecution, either as a result of government policies or societal attitudes (2019 World Watch List, Open Doors USA). These Christians risk their homes, families, and lives to follow Christ when they gather for prayer or attend Mass. Would you or I be willing to risk as much? This week, consider making some small sacrifice as an act of solidarity with all victims of religious persecution, and pray for all of those who face intimidation, imprisonment, or assault for following Jesus.



Check out this image of the *Martyrs of Libya* by artist Nikola Sarić: <https://www.nikolasaric.de/portfolio/martyrs-of-libya/?lang=en>

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What is the price of following Jesus in your community and country?
- ❖ Does awareness of the persecution Christians face in other countries change your own attitudes toward the practice of your faith (e.g., Mass, confession, public displays of piety)?



September 4, 2022

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #129C

Wisdom 9:13-18b

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

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Luke 14:25-33

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel focuses on the difficulty and cost of discipleship. Jesus does not promise an easy life, riches, or fame. Instead, he offers his followers a cross. In stunning fashion, he tells his followers that they must hate their mother and father and even their own life if they wish to be his disciple. Jesus is not talking about feelings here, but rather priorities. The kingdom of God is worth leaving everything behind. It is worth putting first because in it the disciple will be made whole. Jesus tells two short parables about a tower being built and a king marching to battle, and in both stories the point is being driven home: be aware of what you are getting into before you start. Being a follower of Christ is costly, requires work and patience, and the rewards are truly out of this world.

Q FOCUS: Put God first and your life will be in the right order.

Liturgical Calendar Connection

A woman who lived the kingdom of God, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is remembered this week (September 5). As a saint who was alive in our recent history, many are familiar with her story, even non-Christians. Her witness is a wonderful example of putting Jesus first and letting his love shape our lives. This week the Church also celebrates St. Peter

Claver (September 9). He exemplifies the life of a disciple by putting others first. He ministered to the slaves in what is now Colombia in the 1600s. His advocacy for the slaves of that area is a model for our own life of discipleship in advocating against racial injustices and actively working to make Christ's message of human dignity a reality.

Church Teaching Connection

"Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness" (*Lumen fidei*, 53).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 14:25-33

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Whoever wishes to be my disciple must hate their father and mother. Upon the first reading of this passage, we hear a very unexpected message from Jesus. Does Jesus really mean that we're supposed to hate people?

A closer look at this Gospel passage will help us to better understand why Jesus is saying these things. First, Jesus is using a speaking device called "hyperbole." A hyperbole is an exaggeration to prove a point. While his hearers in the first century would certainly have been surprised by his words, they would have also been able to put it into context.

For our understanding, examples of common hyperbole today include statements like, "I'm starving!" or "This is taking forever!" We are really not starving, but we might feel very hungry. Waiting for something to happen seems to go on and on, but certainly not forever.

► **Why do you think we use hyperboles in our daily lives? What other hyperboles do we use?**

► **Why might Jesus be using this figure of speech to speak to the crowds?**

Another thing that helps us understand Jesus' harsh statements is to remember that Jesus is teaching the massive crowds who are following him. As his popularity grows, he knows that not all of these followers will be with him at the end. In fact, his life will end alone on a cross. He may have a lot of fans, but he is looking for followers.

► **What do you think is the difference between a fan and a follower?**

When we are fans of our favorite sports teams, artists, or social media personalities (even though many platforms use the term "followers," we will include these in the category of "fans"), we might know some facts about them and enjoy what they do. We may even have some memorabilia, their poster on our wall, or have purchased branded merchandise. It is fun to be a fan!

But Jesus doesn't want us to just be his fans. He doesn't just want us to know *about* him, he wants us to *know* him! He wants us to be his followers, his disciples. To be a disciple is a lifestyle. We make a commitment in our choices and mindset. We don't just appreciate that Jesus loved the poor and said interesting things. We are meant to love what he loves and live out his word in all aspects of our life.

The truth is, though, following Jesus is not easy. In a parallel Gospel passage in Matthew, Jesus says "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). When it is put this way, Jesus' message becomes clearer. He is not advocating hatred toward our family members, but he is showing us how to prioritize our love as we live as his followers. Jesus isn't one thing to love among many other things to love. It isn't about basketball, tacos, social media, and Jesus. Christian life is about Jesus. It is through faith in Christ that all our other priorities are ordered, like our love for family and friends, and even fun things like basketball and tacos!

► **What might it look like to put a relationship with Jesus first in our lives, specifically in the lives of young people like yourselves? How does putting God first order our other actions?**

We can love the other things, but loving God is the first step in truly becoming a disciple and follower of Jesus, and not just a fan.

Reflect on the things that you love the most. Ask yourself this question: Do you love these things more than Jesus? The Gospel message today provides an opportunity for us to challenge our own perspectives: How can we love Jesus through these things that we love? Or, how can loving Jesus change the things we love? Invite Jesus into the things that you love and pray to love the things that Jesus loves. Then we will not just be fans, but followers.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 18.

Following Jesus expands our horizons, giving us a strong faith so that we can rest assured in the promise of his love.

Jesus calls us not to hate our families, rather he call us to put God first.

Invite Jesus into all the loves of your life and allow his love to illuminate and enhance your passions.

Act on the Word

Trivia Night

For this activity, you will need a list of trivia questions about the Catholic faith, your parish community, and pop culture or local sports or city facts, and prizes for the winner(s).

Putting a relationship with Christ first doesn't always have to be hard work. This activity helps the young people grow in their knowledge of faith in a fun and engaging trivia competition. It also reminds us of today's reflection on being a fan or a follower. Topics should include faith facts (“followers”) but also non-faith related topics that the young people enjoy (“fans”).

A key to a successful trivia night is to have a variety of topics that participants can engage in, so you

can include other topics outside of the faith, like pop culture, sports, or local facts. You can use a digital version of trivia using websites or apps like Kahoot or using *Jeopardy* type templates. You could also use no digital equipment and read questions and have participants raise their hand or pick contestants. Your trivia questions should match the knowledge base of your audience, and have tiers of difficulty.

Possible faith related questions could include:

- * Where was Jesus born? [Answer: Bethlehem.]
- * In the Gospel, Jesus wept. Why did Jesus weep? [Answer: His friend Lazarus had died (John 11:35).]
- * How old was Jesus when he was lost at the Temple? [Answer: Twelve years old.]
- * What was the name of the first Christian martyr? [Answer: Stephen (Acts 7:54–60).]
- * How many loaves and fish did Jesus use to feed the crowd in John 6? [Answer: Five loaves and two fish.]
- * Who baptized Jesus? [Answer: John the Baptist.]
- * Which meal does the Bible say Jesus cooked: breakfast, lunch, or dinner? [Answer: Breakfast (John 21:1–14).]

Closing Prayer

O Lord,
you teach us your ways and truth.
Grant that we may desire
to deepen our faith.
May we give honor to you
and not the things of this earth.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.itp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.