

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of wisdom in the making of decisions and the cost of discipleship. They invite us to listen to Jesus demands so that we come to wise decisions for the sake of God's kingdom and for our eternal life.

The first reading talks about God's mind and thoughts that are far from human intelligence. It affirms that human beings are incapable of grasping God's plans and designs. Unless God comes to their rescue with his wisdom and the Holy Spirit, the path of humans can never become straight.

What is behind this text is the idea that it is difficult for human beings to discern God's will in the many things happening in our lives. Another idea is the truth that, as human beings, our mind is so limited that without God's assistance, we are lost.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the demands for being his disciple. First of all, Jesus affirms that it is impossible to be his disciple if one does not hate his family members or his own life. Second, he declares that it is impossible to be his disciple if one cannot carry his cross after him.

After that, Jesus invites the crowd to calculate the cost of being a disciple. In order to show the relevance of his speech, Jesus refers to the construction of a tower. He says that anyone who wants to build one should first sit down and calculate if, with the resources he has, he can reasonably finish the job. The reason for such care lies in the fact that if he starts and cannot finish, people would be laughing at him for the unfinished job.

Then, Jesus refers to the battlefield. He says that a good chief of army looks first at the number of troops he has before engaging a combatant enemy. If after the evaluation of the forces in presence, he realizes that he cannot win the victory, it would be wise and in his interest to settle peace with his enemy. Finally, Jesus finishes his speech by saying that in the same way, whoever does not renounce all his possessions cannot be his disciple.

What do we learn from this Gospel? What I want to share with you today is the cost of discipleship. In fact, Jesus sets today three demands that anyone willing to be his disciple has to fulfill in order to belong to him, namely detachment from family-love, carrying of the cross and disinterest from material possessions.

In fact, to be a disciple of Jesus is not as simple as people think; it is demanding and challenging. It requires a sacrifice, a change of behavior and a conversion of heart in order to attune it to the reality of God's kingdom. That is why Jesus refers to the chief of army who evaluates the strength of his troops before starting a war or to the builder of a tower who evaluates his means before building.

The first demand is detachment from family. In fact, the discipleship requires a high degree of courage and a high love of Jesus that leads to detachment from family and one's life. This point is crucial and true. For instance, one of the reasons why some young men and women do not want to become priests or religious today is the fact that they will never found a family. The idea of living without a family discourages them from commitment to religious life.

Positively, what does it mean? With this demand, Jesus does not teach us a pure hatred of the members of our family. What he wants, rather, is that in our prioritizing, he has to come first. In that sense, we have to prefer him to the family ties we have, even to our own life. If, then, the members of our family are an obstacle to our relationship with him, our choice should be clear.

The second demand is relative to the cross. Because to be a disciple is demanding, it certainly involves the cross. The cross is the symbol of all the difficulties and hardships we have to accept for the sake of Jesus' kingdom. It has nothing to do with masochism.

Positively, it means that whatever might be the difficulties and trials we meet in our life; they should not divert us from or diminish our love of Jesus. We have always to remember that, as hard as they might be, we are not alone in our difficulties. Jesus is with us and shares everything with us, because he has been the first to pass through suffering and the cross.

Does it mean that the cross becomes light because we are not alone? No; it means only that whatever might be its intensity and difficulty, God will never abandon us. As it was with Jesus, so will it be with us. That is why some people, instead of being depressed and desperate, find spiritual growth and peace in the suffering they endure in their body.

The third demand is renunciation of possessions. Like the first, this demand is very challenging, because of the configuration of our culture that is based on material possessions. This is also challenging for young men and women of our time who find it difficult to become priests or religious, because those latter do not have possessions and comfort proper to our culture. As someone said, priests are overworked, but materially speaking they earn nothing.

Why is Jesus insisting on renouncing possessions? Because, material possessions can become an obstacle in the relationship with God. This is so true that human experience has shown that some people are so obsessed with wealth that nothing counts outside of their possessions. It is also true that material possessions can lock the heart of someone in his goods as though they were an absolute value. And yet, everything is transitory, as well as everything is God's gift, even those things we have acquired through hard work.

With all that in mind, we understand why Jesus talks about sitting down and calculating the cost of discipleship in order to satisfy the demands of God's kingdom. If we do not take seriously Jesus' requirements, it is possible to miss the kingdom of God. Let us pray, then, that the Lord give us wisdom so that we are capable of dealing with the things of this world in the right way. May God bless you all!

Wisdom 9: 13-18b; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14: 25-33



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