

Twenty-Third Sunday day in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the gap between God's ways and human's plans. They show that the ways of God are beyond human reach and understanding. They invite us to look for God's wisdom so that we come to make the right decisions capable of helping us being true disciples of Jesus.

The first reading describes the limitations of human intelligence. It shows that it is difficult for human beings to know and understand God's ways unless there is support from above. They invite us to ask for God's Wisdom and Holy Spirit so that we come to grasp his ways.

What is behind this text is the expression of the limitations of human intelligence. There is also the conviction that God's ways are above human grasp. The last idea is related to the truth that without the Holy Spirit, we cannot know God and please him.

This text allows us to understand what is at the stake in today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' speech to the crowd of those who were traveling with him. It also gives Jesus' statement with regard to the renunciation of family and relatives in order to follow him. Then, it speaks of the importance of the cross that Jesus recommends to those who want to be his disciples.

After that, the Gospel speaks of the importance of calculating the cost of being Jesus' disciple in the two examples that Jesus refers to in the case of building a tower and of the king who prepares the war. The Gospel ends with Jesus' statement that anyone who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be his disciple.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the cost of discipleship. Let me start by telling you a story. For two years now, I have been taking piano lessons. In spite of all my good will, I am really struggling and things are not that easy. Sometimes the pieces I practice very well when I am alone, I cannot play them correctly when my teacher is there. This struggle has led me to understand the popular saying that goes: "no pain, no gain".

This process of gaining only after pain is the way Jesus proposes to anyone who wants to be his disciple. That is why in today's Gospel, he is setting conditions that each one has to fulfill in order to be his true disciple.

First, there is the detachment from family affection and self-love. For Jesus, indeed, to be his disciple requires a high love that is superior to all the familial ties and affections.

When Jesus is saying so, he does not teach us the mere hatred of our family members or of ourselves, which would be contrary to the law of love. What he wants is that we put him above everything and we prefer him to anything, be it our kinship ties or our own life, so that no obstacle stands in our way of loving him.

Second, there is the detachment from material possessions. Such a detachment is needed because at times material attachments prevent us from giving to God

the first place in our life. Moreover, material possessions have the danger of locking our heart into our goods to the point of forgetting that what we have is just a gift received from God, and for that reason we have to share with the needy. In all cases anyway, the truth is that if we choose to follow Christ, we have to change our attitudes toward the goods of this world, because they do not have in themselves an absolute value.

Such a vision helps us understand the demand of St Paul to his disciple Philemon to receive back Onesimus and treat him like a brother dear to him. Such a proposal goes against the customs of times where a slave was treated like a personal property. In other words, by doing so, St Paul teaches him not only forgiveness, but also detachment from material goods.

Third, there is the spirit of calculation. The spirit of calculation has nothing to do with a business model, but it goes in the sense of cleverness and clarity of thought by judging what is profitable to us and can contribute to our salvation and what is not. In that sense, the rule would be: to discern clearly what is good for our salvation and pursue it, and to abandon what is not.

Lastly, there is the capacity of bearing the cross. The cross is part of our life as Christian as it was for Jesus. The cross has nothing to do with masochism. Rather, it is the symbol of the burdens of life. As such, the cross can take many forms. It could be a sickness that we want to get rid of, but it does not work. It could be a difficult relationship, maybe with the spouse, the children or relatives, etc. But, whatever might be its form, to bear the cross means to accept the trials of the present life in faithfulness to Jesus and in his footsteps.

Are these demands of Jesus easy? No. How can we not prefer our family members to anything in the world? Why shall we renounce obvious interest where we would have taken advantage of the situation? Why shall we impose on ourselves sacrifices where we would have been comfortable? In fact, if we remain within human logic and use human arguments, we will never fulfill Jesus' demands. It is only when we let ourselves be guided by God's wisdom and Spirit that we can act accordingly.

Let us pray, then, that God help us to choose him above all! May he fill us with his wisdom so that we come to right decisions in things we do in this world and come to our salvation! God bless you all!

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



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