

## Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C2022

Let me start today's homily in a very simple way by saying that when we read the Gospel, at times we find very difficult words to swallow coming out of the mouth of Jesus, like: "If your eye causes you to sin tear it out", "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off", "If someone hits you at the right cheek, give him the left as well", "Love your enemies", "Pray for your persecutors". Add to all that what we heard in today's Gospel about the hatred of parents, siblings and even of one's life.

But why Jesus is speaking so? What does he mean with all that? What is his intent by saying so difficult things? Jesus wants us to tell us that we have to live our lives, not according to our own standards or world's standards, but his. We have to balance our human considerations with the demands of his Kingdom. In other words, to be a disciple is demanding and challenging. It requires a sacrifice, a change of behavior and a conversion of heart, in order to adapt ourselves to the reality of God's kingdom.

Let us enter into details by looking into the Gospel's demands as presented to us today: First, the detachment from family affection and self-love. For Jesus, 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 else, be it our kinship ties or our own life, so that no obstacle stands in our way of loving him.

This point is important in order to help us understand one of the aspects of the scarcity of the priests in now-a-days. For instance, one of the reasons why some young men or women do not want to become priests or religious is the fact that they will never found a family. The idea of living without a family discourages them from commitment to religious life. There is also the fear of living the life of poverty and obedience, which characteristic of religious life.

Second demand: the detachment from material possessions. Such a detachment is needed because at times material attachments prevent some people from giving to God the first place in their lives. This is so true that human experience has shown that some people are so obsessed with wealth that nothing counts outside of their possessions.

Plus, material possessions have the danger of locking human heart into material goods to the point of forgetting that what we have is just a gift received from God. Because God has blessed us with material possessions, we have to become also a blessing to others. The truth here is that if we choose to follow Christ, we have to change our attitudes toward the goods of this world, which do not have an absolute value in them. We have also to accept sacrifice.

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. Paul's proposal was against the customs of the time where a slave was treated like a personal property and harshly treated in case he ran away. By asking Philemon to welcome him back, St Paul teaches him not only forgiveness, but also detachment from material goods.

Third demand: the spirit of calculation. The spirit of calculation has nothing to do with a business model, but goes in the sense of cleverness and clarity of thought by judging what is profitable and can contribute to eternal salvation. 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. If we miscalculate the price to pay in order to be a true disciple, we are cheating on nobody than ourselves because it is we who would fail.

By referring to the images of construction and war, Jesus wants to tell us that being a disciple is not a one-time decision, but a process that requires some cleverness. It is a commitment that requires an ongoing and intelligent decision in order to come to a successful outcome. When we first decided to follow Jesus, we certainly knew there was a price to pay in terms of renunciation or conversion. But, now we realize how costly all that is. In other words, we would never expect things to be easy; we have to fight in order to win victory like Jesus who went through the cross before coming to the resurrection.

Last demand: the capacity of bearing the cross. Taking up our own cross does not mean seeking out suffering. Jesus himself did not seek out his cross, but he took on that came to him in obedience to the Father.

The cross is part of our life as Christian as it was for Jesus. The cross has nothing to do with masochism. It is the symbol of the burdens and the hardships of life. It 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.

To bear the cross means to accept the trials of the present life in faithfulness to Jesus and in his footsteps. “No matter how you plan things and arrange them to your liking, you still will find something to suffer either willingly or unwillingly (...). Either you will suffer bodily pain, or you will endure in your soul tribulation of the spirit. (...However) If you carry the cross willingly, it will carry and bring you to your longed-for-end, where there will be no more suffering.” [Imitation of Christ].

The demand of the cross means that no matter how we would have it hard, the hardships of life should not divert us from or diminish our love of Jesus. We have always to remember that, as hard as our hardships might be, we are not alone. Jesus is with us and shares everything with us. He was the first to pass through suffering.

Are these demands of Jesus easy? No. How can we not prefer our own family's members to anything in the world? Why shall we renounce obvious interest where we would have taken advantage of some situations? Why shall we impose on ourselves sacrifices where we would have been comfortable? Those questions are important, however 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 his Spirit that we can act according the spirit of the Kingdom.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to choose him above everything! 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! May God bless you all!

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



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