

# Homily for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 7-8, 2019

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

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

It's that time of the year again: kids returning to school, young adults off to college. Just the other day I sent a grandson off to his second year with "keep up the good work!" And a few more loving admonitions. I know he felt the love behind the words. Perhaps even some of the words I didn't say: "life is so precious; so short; choose wisely and well. Each day!"

Here's Jesus today, looking out on the crowd following him. What are they thinking? Hoping for? A miracle worker? As he probes their faces, searches out their hearts, what can he offer them? For he's already seen the "gotcha" looks of some of the religious leaders. He's already put them on notice for their hypocrisy. He's even just lamented over Jerusalem, "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it."

But now, what can he possibly say to this crowd—maybe drawn by his words of wisdom, or his healing of those in need? Do they have any idea of what it will take to follow him? Of the cost involved in making discipleship decisions? Is that why he speaks so urgently today out of tough love?

I distinctly remember some 50 years ago, during my early days of high school teaching. One of the seniors in my class was bright, but did just enough work to earn himself a C. His mother was president of the school board. After he received his mid-term grade of C, the principal came to me with this request (a demand, really): Change his grade to an A, so he can get into Yale! I was stunned! I refused, of course! But I was also 7 months pregnant with our first child and was leaving at the end of the term. What if I'd been the only breadwinner? Could I have so easily refused his demand? That question has stayed with me.

So, yes, making discipleship decisions can be tough. An enormous challenge. Jesus knows that, first hand. Yet, I'm also moved today by the young King Solomon, traditionally named as author of the Book of Wisdom. Here's a man of privilege, wealth, position—about to reign over his people. And yet, somehow,

he already understands that he simply cannot do it alone. He cannot do it without Wisdom. He's already proclaimed: "I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light." God, "I am your servant ... a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgment and laws." So, please, "give me the wisdom that sits by your throne." I can't do this without her! Only then will I have understanding. Only then can I govern well.

How true is that for each of us today! For we, like Solomon, are meant to be rulers of our lives. By virtue of our Baptism into Jesus, the Christ, we have already been declared holy, prophetic, and capable of governing our own hearts and lives.

We, like Solomon, surely know we have work to do, work unique to each and every one of us. Work based upon our God-given gifts. Work we can't possibly do alone. Not without God. Not without Wisdom laboring at our side. Not without Jesus, often named the Wisdom of God. In a world that's tough. A mess. Broken and heart-broken. In a world where guns have become an addiction to many people. In a world where the National Rifle Association controls too many politicians. In a world where immigrants come, hungering for food, a home, and work. In a world where too many are turned away, where families are disrupted, where cruelty, rather than welcome, seems to reign. In a world where the days of preserving our climate are numbered.

Jesus, forever the truth-teller, is right to challenge us all today with tough love. Imagine with me, won't you ... that Jesus is looking each of us in the eye as he scans the crowd. You. Me. Can we see ... feel his intense love? The urgency of his questions: What matters most to you? Where have you made a difference? What still pokes at you? What still needs your attention? Your courage? Your willingness to be disturbed so as to be changed? Is it something in the church? The political system? Something within your grasp but not beyond your reach? Something that demands you connect with others, for you cannot do this alone? What is your dream, the dream that will not let you go? Stay with this ... for it really matters.

It's time to bless the young people, to send them on their way for another year. Time to remember that we, too, have work to do. For our future, and theirs. Time to respond whole-heartedly to the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato si*,

“Each generation holds the earth in trust for the next; each generation is responsible for passing it on intact.”