

23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; Sept. 4th 2022
Wisdom 9: 13-18; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14: 25-33

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Especially during the election time we hear the most attractive promises of the politicians, mainly of the Presidential candidates. But very often many of those promises will remain only in the words and in the papers. Still people would like to hear the promises. If any Presidential candidate is promising you, more job cuts, economic recession, less pay and high inflation rate, no doubt no one is going to elect him/her at all.

Today's gospel reading shows that Jesus was not a good politician. We see the disciples and crowd being bewildered by the startling honesty of Jesus. The ordinary people considered Jesus as a miracle worker who could heal the sick, multiply the bread and feed them; some thought that he was a great prophet. In the eyes of the scribes and Pharisees he was a law breaker and the friend of tax collectors and sinners. **But the twelve men followed him with higher political and social expectations.** In other words, they thought that Jesus would be capturing the power from the Romans and rule over Palestine and they would be his cabinet members. In order to confirm this fact we have to go to the gospel of Mark chapter 10: 37, where John and James approach Jesus with a request, **“Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.”** By ‘your glory’ they meant, not the glory which Jesus would attain at his resurrection but the glory of the material kingdom.

As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, the disciples concluded that he was going to assume the political power. The incident of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem inflated their expectation. But Jesus knew that it was his last journey to Jerusalem not to ascend to the throne rather to the cross. As his time was approaching fast, Jesus didn't have any big rosy promises to make to his disciples, except *suffering and cross*. One thing what we need to appreciate in Jesus is his honesty with the people. He never promised anything to them which he could not fulfill; never asked them to do anything which he was not prepared to face. When Jesus asks his followers in *Matthew 16: 24*, *“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”* Remember, Jesus took up his cross before us and went to Calvary.

In today's gospel Jesus says, **“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 disciples.”** Don't these words **contradict** the very teaching of Jesus on the commandment of **love**? For Jesus asks in Matthew's gospel chapter 5, *“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”* Then how could the word **hate** come

out of the mouth of Jesus? So we need a little clarification on this saying. If we take the similar saying of Jesus given in Matthew we will come to know better what Jesus meant by **'hating'** our dear ones. In Mt. 10: 37 we hear Jesus say, **"whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me."** So it is very clear that what Jesus means **'hate'** in Luke is that *we should not love anybody or anything in the world more than we love Jesus*. In other words, our number one priority in life should be Jesus and the kingdom of God. In the words of Jesus it is very clear that there is a cost attached to discipleship. It is easy to be called Christians as the baptismal water is poured on our heads; **but to be a real disciple of Jesus is different and it requires the change of our life style**. St. Gregory the Great says, **"To renounce what one has is a minor thing, but to renounce what one is, demands a lot."**

Great men and women, as we read in the history of the Church, kept this priority for Jesus even at the cost of their lives. For instance, a few days before the execution of Sir Thomas More, his wife pleaded with him in jail to renounce the Catholic Church and follow the order of the King of England, for the sake of their children. Thomas More replied, **"In fact I love my nation and family dearly. But above all I love and fear God. If I escape the execution by giving testimony against my conscience, that will be against the will of God. I would rather like to be executed than to go against the will of God."** Today Thomas More is honored as a great saint and martyr.

Today's gospel challenges us to see where our priority lies? Am I ready renounce myself and carry my daily crosses and follow Jesus? Jesus is not interested in the part time Christians whose discipleship is confined to a Christmas Mass or Easter Mass. He wants people who can be faithful to him in all their life time. Christian discipleship involves a cost; cost of sacrifice and detachment. In Luke's gospel chapter 9:57 on, we find three men willing to follow Jesus; but after fulfilling certain material duties they would come back and follow Jesus. To them Jesus says, **"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what is left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62)**. Do I belong to this category of people who give God what is left over; the left over time and secondary priority? *My friends, if we give the best to Jesus he has the best to give us back. If he is the last priority in our lives, we too will be his last priority and in our dire needs, he will not be with us at all.* When we keep a balance between our spiritual life and material life, we will be able to give what is due to God.