

Homily
September 4, 2022
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
27:03 – 38:30 (From the pulpit)

(Microphone Spits and Pops!!)

Happy Labor Day. I have to think of something happy right now because I want to throw this...No. (to himself) No. Don't have a hissy fit. Don't do that. (Moves to the Ambo.)

Should we just start all over? All right.

The Book of Wisdom. It was once thought of as the "Wisdom of Solomon," because of King Solomon's legendary pursuit of wisdom. But the book was written long after Solomon the king, somewhere between 150 and 100 years BC.

In our reading today from Wisdom, Chapter 9, we heard a part of *Solomon's Prayer*, as the author names it. It is an expansion of Solomon's own request of God, found in First Kings Chapter 3 and Second Chronicles Chapter 1, where he inveighed upon the Lord for two things. "Give me wisdom. May I may use that wisdom to rule well, to care for the people and their needs."

Essentially what we heard in our reading is that the pursuit of wisdom, whether it's heavenly or worldly, requires focus. It's demanding. It's challenging. Wisdom emerges as in birth pangs, laboriously coming to light. But what comes to light is most precious.

Discipleship requires focus, is demanding, challenging. For it to bear fruit, it will require toil, dedication, sacrifice, love – indeed, one's entire self. But when Jesus invites folks on that road, what's the word he uses about being a disciple? Hate. Hate does not seem to be a word of Wisdom, does it? It's harsh.

But what Jesus is doing here is using what is known as a *semiticism*. It's a figure of speech to describe the cost of discipleship. The Greek word that Luke uses here is, "maseo," and it can mean "hate." But in this context, it can also mean "devalue." Perhaps another word would be "renounce," with which we are familiar. Or "rename."

"Hate." It is a radical term to be sure. Why would Jesus use it, especially in regard to family? Well, in ancient Jewish culture, my brothers and sisters, honoring father and mother was essential. It was central to their lives. And this Commandment also stretched to family, clan, tribe.

In those days a person identified not as an “I,” but as part of the extended family. They named themselves from that Horizon. They did not identify as an individual “self” as we do. Just think of the many times in Old Testament and New when you hear phrases like, “Joseph of the House of David,” or other such descriptions. It’s never just the individual. The Horizon identity for them was family, clan, tribe.

Knowing this then, it seems that Jesus is saying that “hate” or “devaluation” of family is a reset of the notion of one’s very self. Instead of identifying oneself in the Horizon of family, he urges to place family in his Horizon of discipleship – following him.

He’s changing the priority. How do you name yourself? What is your focus? As one who follows, it is discipleship in Christ Jesus. But he makes it very clear that to do so is going to be costly. To come to birth as a disciple, Jesus says -- it is a demanding, challenging and at times painful process. For it is all-encompassing, all-consuming, all-defining.

For you and I, my brothers and sisters, the beginning of our being a disciple was with words. They were words spoken in faith. We call them “our Baptismal Promises.” And yes, for most of us, our parents made those promises. They placed us in the Horizon of discipleship. What they did was take on responsibility in their words of promise to nurture a disciple, their child. Even as they themselves were living, emerging disciples.

In the words that they used in the ritual, they promised to reject sin and Satan in their lives, to believe in God: Father, Son and Spirit, and to embrace God’s people, the Church as the largest family to which they and their child will ever belong. It is here that they place their discipleship and the discipleship of their child into the Horizon of Christ.

Our life as disciples is maintained in the Sacraments. Each ritual, whether it takes place just once -- or is repeated -- strengthens, feeds, reinvigorates our commitment to the life as a disciple. Words such as, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” “The Body of Christ,” “The Blood of Christ,” “Bless me Father, for I have sinned,” “I absolve you of your sins,” as well as, “Through this Holy Anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy, help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” And of course, “I do.” And for one like myself, “I do, with the help of God.”

The disciple who shares the power of these words in their Horizon with Christ does so through their status in life. It begins with munchkins. (Speaking to a young child...) It’s Levi Francis, right? Levi

Francis. How old are you? Four? You're a part of the growing, maturing life. As are the two of you (addressing the altar servers), Claire and Ian. That's your status right now. Right?

Then there is single life within the Church. There is married life. And of course, consecrated and ordained life. Each of these are rooted in words of commitment uttered once in a ritual proclamation. Each are lived out in actions which embody the commitment. The words once uttered are repeated in action time and time again.

Well, now it's true at times we will speak words such as (slightly groaning), "If only I had known..." Have you ever spoken those words in your status in life? I have. Especially the first time I got to be a part of a Capital Campaign. *Oh. If only I had known, I would have gone to work for UPS.* But, those words are often spoken in moments of trial, frustration or confusion in our disciple life. Through such words and moments we are not too gently reminded of the cost of discipleship in our life in the Church which we have chosen and to which we are called.

There are many other words on which we rely: Scripture, writings of sages past and present, soothing, encouraging conversations with friends, spouse, colleagues, and of course, words of prayer with the One whose call to be a disciple has oriented our life in his Horizon.

Perhaps it would be good to recall his words of encouragement. Not just, "It's going to cost to follow me," but these, "I will be with you always until the end of time."

These are words of steadfast love. These are words of wisdom. They accompany the wise words with which we began:

You cannot be my disciple unless you rename everything.