

Twenty Third Sunday of Ordinary Time September 4, 2022

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading — Wisdom 9:13-18 13

For what man can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? 14 For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, 15 for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. 16 We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? 17 Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given wisdom and sent thy holy Spirit from on high? 18 And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by wisdom.”

Responsorial Psalm PS 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 AND 17

R. (1) In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You turn man back to dust, saying, “Return, O children of men.” For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You make an end of them in their sleep; the next morning they are like the changing grass, Which at dawn springs up anew, but by evening wilts and fades.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days. And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Second Reading — Philemon 9-10, 12-17

9 yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an ambassador and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment. ... 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. 13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing

without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will. 15 Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

Gospel Reading — Luke 14:25-33 25

Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, 26 “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, ‘This man began to build, and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. 33 So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Christianity is aptly called a mystery, and our beliefs, the mystery of faith. This week's Gospel reading introduces one of the most important aspects of that mystery; the cost of discipleship. That term itself, cost of discipleship, introduces an enigma, for salvation is offered as a free gift. It's no wonder that some have become confused and seek to earn that which can only be given; eternal life. And some have become irresponsible, willing to invest nothing for that which is so costly. The thief on the cross is perhaps the best example of the free gift of salvation. The thief did nothing to earn salvation. His knowledge of Jesus was limited and his faith immature and undeveloped—yet he had enough faith to ask, "Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom." To this meager faith Jesus freely grants salvation, assuring the thief that, "This day you will be with me in paradise." Consider for a minute what would have happened if, after being granted the promise of paradise the thief had been taken down from the cross and released rather than having been left to die? What would have been required of him? In his gratitude for salvation and possessing new life in Christ he would be faced with some life changing decisions. Would he simply resume his old life of thievery, or not? Would the people who had influenced him previously be allowed to have the same continuing influence, or not? Would his old desires and values, that led him into a life of thievery still reign in his life, or not? The only reasonable alternative was for him to become a genuine follower of his Savior Jesus, but to do so would have cost him dearly. His family, friends, society and even his old nature would all resist a life of true dedication to following Jesus. You can almost hear his family and friends saying, "After all, you can be religious without going overboard, can't you?" For each of us there comes a time when we are faced with the decision whether we will follow Christ wholeheartedly and without reservations. It is important to consider the cost, and as well to consider the benefits. For if we fail to consider the cost we might easily turn back from the journey when our life as a believer becomes difficult. If we fail to consider the benefits we will never make the right decision to forsake all and follow him, for we will only see the possible cost. In my fifty-six years of following Christ I have never met one man or woman who weighed the cost and made this decision to follow Christ wholeheartedly, who ever expressed regret. Rather they always spoke from the perspective that they had given so little and had received so much. On the other hand I have known some who having put their hand to the plow without considering the cost, turned back, and others who out of fear of the cost never made the decision to wholeheartedly follow Jesus. For these, their life is characterized by an element of sadness usually expressed in terms of regret. We cannot out give God, and when we wholeheartedly give him our life he gives it back a hundredfold. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well, "When Christ calls a man he bids him, 'come die.'" We cannot follow Christ from afar, hanging back on the fringes of the committed, for it is in that never-never land on the fringes of commitment where we are most likely to be torn apart by the spiritual forces pulling us in opposite directions. Consequently when Jesus says, "Therefore, whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple," he does us a favor. For the key to happiness as a Christian need not be a mystery, it is wholehearted, unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ. Anything less, simply creates a war zone in our soul which tears us apart and makes us miserable, half-hearted Christians.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading —

1. How does this passage clarify why we must have faith as a little child to follow Christ?

Second Reading —

2. How does this account of Onesimus, the slave, and Saint Paul's intercession for him reflect the message of salvation and discipleship?

Gospel Reading —

3. How would you describe your journey of commitment to be Jesus' disciple?
4. What aspect of life do you struggle with that hinders your wholehearted commitment?
5. How do we build upon our foundation—our baptismal vows?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.