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Migrants check into a shelter in Salto de Agua, Mexico, during a power outage June 28. The shelter has seen a surge in migrants arriving in recent months. (CNS/David Agren)



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One thing Jesus lacked was good PR advice. Compare any advertising you have seen with his talk about what it takes to be his follower. Unless it's aiming to make you a Navy Seal, advertising tries to entice with comforts and perks, with the wonderful reasons for buying their product.

## **Sept. 8, 2019, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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Wisdom 9:13-18b

Psalm 90

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Luke 14:25-33

Not Jesus. Just when he has a big crowd chasing after him, he turns around and tells them that if they want to follow him they have to abandon family ties, get over their instincts for self-preservation, and be ready to shoulder the worst things they can imagine. St. Teresa of Ávila tried to explain that this was a problem. She told him, "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few."

Today's Gospel suggests that many of us who assess discipleship by baptism, confirmation, liturgical ministry, etc., are far more comfortable than Jesus' followers should expect to be. We may occasionally stand up for a principle, go beyond tithing, or open ourselves to ridicule by claiming to be Christians in the midst of more sophisticated people who have learned about religion from Marx or Freud, but that's chicken scratch compared to what Jesus calls for in today's Gospel.

If we want to contemplate a contemporary example of the sort of commitment Jesus is talking about, we should get to know some of the Central American migrants who abandon their homelands to seek a new life for themselves and their families. They

get on the road with only what they can carry — and that might be nothing more than their infant children. They are convinced that the existence they know, disfigured as it is by violence, corruption or lethal poverty, does not measure up to the promise that is every person's birthright. As they make their pilgrim journey, they create communities of the desperately hopeful, nurturing solidarity as a skill that allows them to survive as genuinely human beings.

Jesus advised would-be followers to calculate the cost of discipleship. He reminded them that smart people gauge the expenses before taking on a construction project. They must decide if they can afford a project that demands so many bricks per square foot at so many shekels per brick, plus labor and permits, bribes and a cushion for the unexpected. Ultimately, the key question is not the price, but how much do you want the goal? Is what you are seeking worth the cost?

Jesus was telling the crowds that following him is an all-or-nothing proposition. In that, he was living up to the reputation of Israel's God as a jealous God. This was not the first time that he'd said something like this. Twice he sent missionaries out empty-handed, telling them to rely on the results of their preaching rather than their wallets. In his days in the desert, Jesus had to overcome temptations to autonomy in order to rely only on God's love and leading.

Before he was born, his own mother had to give up her plans and risk her reputation so that God's will could be fulfilled through her. Handing everything over to God was in his genes, and he wanted to bring others into the family tradition.

The Book of Wisdom says, "The deliberations of mortals are timid and unsure are our plans."

In the Gospel, Jesus invites us to think like immortals. Lest we call that a contradiction in terms, he shows us the way. Over and over, Jesus invites us to become free of all that ties us down, of all that keeps our focus on what older religious traditions called "temporalities." Those are things that come with a guarantee of a lifetime or less.

We can learn today from the immigrants who are fixed on hope for the future. Like our ancestors who came from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Vietnam, Korea and many other places, they are renouncing everything because they believe human life was created for something greater than the reality that surrounds them. Even more

than tower-builders or generals, their journey demonstrates what it means to pay the price of discipleship.

Jesus' command, "Do this in memory of me," is a call to follow him along the road of total commitment. If we let the migrants challenge us to discipleship, every time we meet them or see their picture, we should ask Christ where he wants us to go and what we should leave behind.

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